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Skeleton out of the Cupboard

Valentine Williams

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Skeleton out of the Cupboard

By Valentine Williams

*"And though circuitous and obscure
The feet of Nemesis, how sure!"*

SIR WILLIAM WATSON

London

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Chapter One

THE first disaster was the rain, the second when the lane I was threading unexpectedly shot up over a positively prehistoric little donkey-back bridge across a single line of railroad and lay down and died in a ploughed field, the third when my lamp proceeded to go out. Leaning against the bicycle I had bought second-hand in London: "Hell's bells!" I murmured to the streaming sky.

I had stopped off for tea that afternoon at one of those tea-places you find all over England, very oak-beamy, with paper serviettes and home-made scones and a table of "art souvenirs." It was getting on towards evening, after a heavenly August day, when at length I started out for Maiden Shapley. The horse-faced female who kept Ye Olde Tea Pottle was vague about Arkwood; but Maiden Shapley was the "darlingest" little country town and 'The Pheasant' an "ever so ducky" little inn where I could stop the night—it would be "a nice run" for me before supper. Well, it was a "nice run" all right—once you got to the top of the hills. But with a bike, before you can coast down you have to push the damn thing up and, as though with the sole purpose of daunting my intrepid American spirit, the Almighty appeared to have collected all the corkscrew hills and all the dizziest descents in the west of England and dumped them down there, between me and Maiden Shapley, after first thoughtfully opening the rain tap full-cock and coating the roads with a fine layer of red, sticky mud.

A gnarled signpost, like something out of an old English coaching print, bearing the almost obliterated notice: "To Maiden Shapley 5½ Miles," was my undoing—it had obviously pointed the way to a bridle-path, and not a road. Well, there was no help for it—I should have to retrace my steps. It would mean riding in the dark, since my lamp was out; but I didn't care. It was nearly nine o'clock and I had done all the walking I intended to do, pushing my machine up those darn

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hills. All I wanted was a dry roof to my head; anyhow, in that rain and at that time of night I was likely to have the lane to myself.

It was little better than a cart track and as I slithered along in the mud, back over the way I had come, I was minded to abandon my trip and take the first available train back to London. But when I thought of Elmer, as I had seen him on the occasion of our last and final blow-up at that little town where we had halted for lunch, I felt my resolution stiffen. Let him go back to London, the poor sap: I would see Devonshire or bust.

I could hear him now with that infuriatingly self-righteous air of his: "But, Clarissa, you know nothing about this Englishman! You say yourself, he's only a guest in this house, wherever it is—what'll the folks think? This isn't America, remember! I've heard they have pretty loose ideas about morals and that kind of thing in English society, and people are always eager to think the worst."

I laughed. "I guess I'll chance that. Ronald Barber's all right."

"A fellow you picked up on the boat!"

"Well, I picked *you* up on the boat, didn't I?"

"It's not the same thing. I'm an American."

"That doesn't give you any right to try and control my actions."

"Not even when I can't leave you for half-an-hour to look at the brasses in the church without finding you drinking at a bar and roaring out songs with a lot of strange men!"

"So I can't let a couple of harmless-college boys buy me a drink without being called a wanton?"

"Why, Clarissa Pell! I never called you a wanton!"

"You did!"

"I didn't!"

Bah, it served me right for teaming up with a hick like Elmer Guthrie. Nevertheless, the vision of my late touring companion dining comfortably in London gave me a certain pang. To Hades with him, I told myself, pedalling furiously, and to Hades with the hills, and to Hades with the horse-faced woman

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who had sent me trailing up and down them in the rain—and with that my front wheel was wrenched violently to one side and I went sailing over the handle-bars.

I had hit a heap of stones. I sat up with my hands cut, my mouth full of mud and a violent pain in my left ankle. It was the last straw—so much the last straw that I could only sit there and laugh while the rain ran down the neck of my oil-skin and the water gurgled in the ditches. When I finally struggled up, it was to find that my ankle was hurting me so much I could scarcely stand on it while, on retrieving my bike, I discovered that the back tyre was flat.

Well, that settled it—now I *would* have to walk. Pushing my bike, I set out, hobbling in agony. Fortunately the place where I crashed was not far from the main road and, after limping along it for about a quarter of a mile, I saw lights through a blur of rain and heard a dog barking. I had a wild hope that I had reached my destination, that it might be Maiden Shapley; but a solitary car hurtling past in the wet showed me in its headlamps the name of "Burstowe" on the black-and-yellow A.A. sign; beyond it a belfry rising from some trees and a curving street of thatched cottages.

I followed the street along. Here and there a window glowed or a radio jangled into the sopping night; but apart from me, not a living creature seemed to be abroad. Then, at the far end of the village, I came upon the inn. It was quite small, a decayed, lop-sided little house, beamed in black with overhanging gables. A sign creaked on a tall post beside the horse-trough in the open space in front, but I could not make it out in the dark: a lantern burning above the porch, however, illuminated a board setting forth that Wm. Ebenezer Bunting was Licensed to Sell Wines, Spirits, Ale, Cider and Perry.

The front door was ajar. Propping my machine against the porch, I went inside. It was a terribly old house, everything aslant and sagging with age, with low ceilings and crooked black oak beams appearing between the whitewash—I should not have been surprised if a man in doublet and hose had come out to greet me. But no one appeared. One would have said that the wet outside had seeped through to the worn flags of

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the passage, for they were greasy with the damp. There was a faint odour of mildew and dead furniture in the air.

I peeped in through a door that stood open, upon a dim whitewashed tap. Half-a-dozen rustics sat on benches round the walls contemplating in a mournful silence the tobacco-smoke drifting blue under the hanging oil-lamp. A misshapen little man in shirt-sleeves and a cloth cap was at the bar behind the beer engines. On catching sight of me he came out into the passage.

He was a hump-back, with the waxen complexion and suffering eyes that often go with this deformity. I said: "Good evening, can I get a room?"

He ran his eyes over me, and I was suddenly conscious of the fact that I was in a polo shirt and an old pair of ski-trousers buttoned at the ankle, under my oilskin. He shook his head.

"Yew'd do better at 'The Pheasant' over tew Maiden Shapley," he answered. "We ain't roightly organoized ter put folks up 'ere. It bean't more'n six moile."

"I've had an accident with my bicycle and hurt my foot," I told him. "You have rooms, surely?"

"Aye, we 'ave rooms, but on'y the wan parlour. An'a chap's got that, a'ready!"

A harsh voice spoke suddenly behind me. "Avast there, you grinning ape!"

I swung about. A door across the passage had swung back, revealing a glimpse of a lighted room beyond. A sharp-nosed, irascible-looking little man with a pipe in his mouth stood on the threshold. He removed his pipe and leered at me, disclosing a row of broken and blackened teeth. "Was you expectin' anyone, my dear?" he inquired smoothly. Then, shuddering, he cried: "By the hokey, a night like this'd warp the living guts out of a body! Shift your ugly carcass out of it, landlord, and let the little lady step in and take a heat of the fire."

He stepped back and I went inside. Some Victorian vandal had done his best to ruin the room with a red wallpaper and a tiled grate. But the original oak beams still striped the low ceiling and the long window, set in the thickness of the wall,

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had diamond panes. Under an oil-lamp suspended from aloft, a table in the centre was set with the remains of a meal. Seen in the light, the newcomer was a short, narrow-shouldered individual in shabby blue serge with thinning grey hair brushed off a sloping forehead, and eyes set rather close. He said again: "Maybe you were sent to meet me, hey?"

I shook my head. "I fell off my bike and hurt my ankle. I'm afraid I can't go on to-night. Besides, I've a tyre punctured."

The landlord broke in with a sort of growl. "We don't cater fer travellers, I tell 'ee. You can't boide 'ere!"

"But if I can't walk——" I protested.

The little man spoke up. "Aw, stow the gaff, Bunting! Can't you see the gel's bin an' cut 'er 'and? Rot me, I wouldn't turn a yaller 'ound away on a night like this." He pointed to a chair. "Set you down 'ere along o' me, Missie, an' git yer tucker, an' the hell with 'im!" He winked at me. "You wuz never born this side of the water, hey?"

I smiled at him. "I'm an American, if that's what you mean."

He chuckled. "I knows it d'reckly I sets eyes on yer. I've bin all over the States, I 'ave—N'York, Chicago, Phoenix, Arizona, 'Ouston, Texas, California, Florida. I wuz down in Florida time o't' boom. Them wor the days, girlie. 'Strewth!" He spat into the fire.

The landlord had veiled his tired eyes. "'Appen yew can't go on, yew'll 'ave to boide 'ere, Oi reckon. But it's rough. An' it'll be foive-bob bed an' brekfus'—money down. Them's moi rights, sence you ain't got no luggage."

"I've a rucksack on my bicycle," I told him. "However..." I fished out two half-crowns. "There you are. Now if you'll show me where I'm to sleep, I'll get my rucksack and change out of these wet things before supper."

"The girl went to choir-practice up at church—Oi don't rightly know about rooms." Muttering to himself he took me to a little cubby-hole off the hall and produced a police form, which I filled in. A similar form already completed lay on top of the litter that oozed out over the edges of the roll-top desk. The ink on it was barely dry—it was my fellow-lodger's, I

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presumed. I read in an illiterate hand: "F. Danbury, Steward, Southampton."

Bunting led the way up a creaking staircase to a cock-eyed little corridor wainscoted in marvellous jet-black oak. He gazed vaguely about, then tentatively opened the door of a room where a fire was burning and the bed turned down. "That's wrong," he rumbled, backing out. "T'other one be there. Yew'se in 'ere, Missie!"

My room was the one adjoining. It was a musty, freezing little room with a massive roof-tree ceiling that sloped sharply down and a floor dipping crazily in the middle and uncarpeted save for a worn strip beside the large brass bed. The cold was penetrating. I shivered. "How about a fire?" I asked.

"It'll be a shillun' extry," replied the hump-back with a cunning look. I laid the shilling on the table. He pocketed it and went out. He was back presently with firing and a basket of logs. He lit the fire and vanished once more, to re-appear with a can of hot water. He lingered at the door to say: "Tap shuts at ten!" and clumped out.

Chapter Two

I WAS glad I had a skirt in my rucksack—I hadn't much fancied the way my fellow-lodger had eyed me in my slacks, down in the parlour. I had a look at my ankle. It was pretty swollen, so I contrived a cold-water compress out of a handkerchief. If it were no better in the morning, I supposed I should have to hunt up a doctor. I changed into my skirt and the Shetland jumper I had bought in London, tidied myself up and limped down to the parlour.

The little man had finished his supper and the landlord was laying a place for me, my fellow-lodger silently watching him, smoking his pipe and nursing his glass. He surveyed me with much approval. "Blimey, don't we look posh!" he exclaimed, and expectorated with deadly accuracy into the fire. He

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wagged his grizzled head. "Well, what I allus sez is, give me the Yankee dames fer style!"

To head him off, I said: "I'm so cold I think I really must have a drink. Won't you have one, too?"

He laughed cacklingly. "The on'y cocktails you'll see around 'ere is in Bunting's barnyard, girlie." He addressed the landlord: "Bunting, you perishin' shrimp, the lady'll take a gin an' French. Two-thirds gin, one-third French, an' I said two-thirds gin, compree? That's the ticket, ain't it, sister?"

"That's the ticket!" I answered. The adventure was beginning to amuse me. My table-companion was really pretty villainous-looking. Now that I saw it under the light, it was an ignoble face, crafty and, I thought, cruel as well—his eyes, sea-water grey under almost lashless lids, were hard as agate.

"An' fer me a double Johnny Walker, same as before," he went on.

The hump-back shuffled silently out. Said the little man, lifting his pipe at me as I sat down to my supper: "Would this trouble you, my dear?"

"Go ahead!" I bade him as I sawed away at the beef. My companion laid his pipe down. "Give us that knife!" he commanded. "No man kin make a bed an' no woman kin carve, as the sayin' goes, though it's a cinch the bloke as made *that* proverb 'adn't never bin a stooard. 'Strewth, w'en I think of the 'undreds of beds I've made up in my time!" He served me expertly.

"You're a steward, aren't you?" I said.

He winked at me. "You seen w'ere I registered, hey? 'F. Danbury, Stooard, S'uth'ampton.'" He nudged me with his elbow. "'You'll 'ave ter register—it's perlice reg'lations,' sez Bunting. 'Shore, I'll register,' sez I. 'Give me that pen!' an' I writes like you see it: 'F. Danbury, Stooard, S'uth'ampton.'" He gave me another hard poke, with the stem of his pipe this time. "I'm travellin' incognyto, see?" he said in a hoarse whisper and added with a chuckle: "Ter be 'eard of under the name of F. Danbury, H'esquire, Sedgwicke Arms, Burstowe."

The return of Bunting with the drinks interrupted this flow

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of confidences. With his hand cupped about the lower part of the whisky bottle, he was about to pour out Danbury's portion when the little man indignantly snatched the bottle away: "Belay there, you dog!" he roared. "Ain't you never 'eard the rule among the gentry: 'A woman by the waist, a bottle by the neck'?" He fluttered his eyelid at me and splashed himself a good half-glassful. Bunting recovered the bottle and slouched out.

"Well," said my companion, raising his glass to me, "'ere's *Salud y pesetas!*' as the dagoes say."

"Here's how!" I gave him back, and wondered what mother would say if she could see her only child hobnobbing with this ruffianly-looking creature in an obscure English pub in the middle of the night.

"Not as I wuz tellin' a untruth in callin' meself a stooard," said the little man between puffs as he re-kindled his pipe. "Ten years I done, reckonin' in lay-offs, but it's a long time back. But lord love yer, I've 'ad so many jobs in my time that ter describe meself right I'd 'ave to put meself down as a ruddy chameleon." He laughed himself into a coughing fit over this joke while I went on with my supper. "You wouldn't think ter look at me, would yer?" he affirmed presently, "that there wuz a time in my life w'en nothink wasn't good enough fer pore old Fred."

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "I think it's not hard to tell that you've seen better days."

He brought his fist down on the table, with a crash that made the glasses dance. "If the next bite wuz ter choke yer, you never said a truer thing, so help me!" he trumpeted. "Dollar smokes—straight across from 'Avana, they wuz, none of yer 'ome-rolled muck—a slap-up car, lovely wimmen. Then the slump come along and afore you could say 'Jack Robinson,' there I wuz out on me—on me uppers. Gor, wot crool luck!" He blew a whiff from his pipe that almost choked me. "I could a-married into the money once. Down in Pará, it wuz—but she wuz a bit too much on the coloured side fer Fred."

He sighed. "I've 'ad me ups an' downs, same as the rest, I

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guess. But I allus tells meself: 'Fred,' I sez, 'if you're down to-day, you may be up to-morrow!' I sez." He shook his head and rotated the contents of his glass. "Yes, sirree, an' maybe, if we could read the future, like some of them astronomical blokes as write in the papers, it's nearer to the top than the bottom pore ole Fred is right at this moment. 'Ere's to fun!"

"Cheers!" I told him, and drained my glass. The little man was off again.

"Not that I 'aven't 'ad me share of luck. I've bin shipwrecked twice, I've bin through a earthquake in Peru, and once, down at Vera Cruz, a 'spig' pulled a gun on me. Blimey, I thought I wuz cold meat that time: I would a-bin, too, if the gun, bein' a spig gun, 'adn't jammed." He spat into the fire again. "I 'ung a chap once."

I shivered. "*You hanged somebody?*"

"That's ri'. Cor, 'e didn't 'arf spin! Way back in the Boer War it wuz, afore you wuz born, w'en I was out with the Mounted Infantry. There wuz a bloke ter be 'ung fer loot, see? On'y there worn't no 'angman. The Camp Commandant, 'e sends fer me. 'Ole man,' sez 'e, very matey, 'there's a five-pun-note in this job,' sez 'e. 'A smart young feller like you could do with a fiver, I'll be bound. W'y don't you take it on?' " He emitted his cackling laugh. "Mind yer, the chaps in my outfit didn't like it but wot the 'ell! A fiver's a fiver, is wot I tole meself. An' fer w'y? 'Cos I'm practical. Yer 'ealth, Miss!"

He drank again and in the little silence that fell I heard the rain lashing the windows and the rumble of the gale in the chimney. The gloating air with which he had recounted his horrid tale seemed to bring home to me the faintly sinister atmosphere of the house. I went on with my supper in silence. My companion puffed at his pipe. "Practical, that's me!" he said. "I'll give you a instance. I'm shipwrecked, see? An' w'en it comes light, there I am out in mid-Atlantic with not a sail in sight an' nothin' but a three-foot spar a'tween me an' kingdom come. Point is, this spar, it ain't 'ardly big enough to support one, let alone anybody else. Well, presently a dame bobs up an' tries to 'ang on. What do I do?"

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I gazed at him tensely, wondering what fresh horror was coming.

"What do I do?" he reiterated. "She'd 'ave 'ad the pair of us at the bottom of the drink, if I'd let 'er; so I ups with me mitt an' coshes 'er good an' proper. I'd seen 'er on board—a millionaire's wife, she wuz, a big, strappin' dame as'd 'ave 'arf a million quid's worth of rocks 'ung round 'er, goin' in ter dinner, nights. But it wuz 'er or me, so I let 'er 'ave it and she never come up no more."

I stared at him, unable to speak. "There wuz 'undreds lorst their lives," he said, "an' not more'n a score survivors, on account of it wuz late in the season, see? An' the sea perishin' cold. The noospapers interviewed me w'en I come ashore; 'ere!"

His hand dived into his coat and produced a shabby letter-case, from which he extracted a soiled envelope containing an age-browned and battered newspaper clipping. I was aware of bold headlines, but read them mechanically without properly taking them in . . . I was thinking of the wretched woman battling her way to that spar through the mountainous Atlantic swell. "'Stoord's Thrilling Narraytive,'" Danbury read out with an air of pride. "That's me!"

I let him put his clipping back in his wallet which he tucked away again. "Do you know these parts?" I asked him, by way of changing the subject. He shook his head, ramming down the tobacco in his pipe with his finger.

"I'm from the north meself—Birken'ead, if you know it. W'ere are you 'eaded for?"

"Devonshire. I meant to stop off the night at Maiden Shapley and lunch with a friend of mine who's staying at a country house 'there. Maiden Shapley's only six miles from here, so Arkwood can't be far."

The little man looked up. "Arkwood, did you say?"

"That's right. Do you know it?"

"It's right outside the village—its grounds come down to the back of the inn 'ere, Bunting wuz tellin' me."

"My friend said it was at Maiden Shapley."

"That's just the postal address, I reckon."

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At that moment the landlord put his head in. "Closin' time," he announced. "If yew've any more orders fer the bar, best tell me now—oi'm turnin' in!"

"Do you know Arkwood?" I asked him as he began to clear the table.

"Aye, shorely," he answered in his surly way.

"Do you know Mr. Ronald Barber, who's staying there?"

He shrugged his misshapen shoulders. "There be one or two from Arkwood as'll come in fer a pint on the way back from golf, but I never paid no 'eed to their names. Loikely 'e be a friend of Sir Glenn's?"

"Sir Glenn's?"

"Sir Glenn Disford, the chap as 'as the place."

"Oh, yes, of course. He'd be staying with him." I stood up. "Well, I'm for bed."

"What's your hurry, sister?" Danbury demanded. "Let's get ole 'olly-and-mistletoe ter set 'em up again."

"If you don't mind, I'll slip off now. I'm dead-beat." With that I made my escape. My fellow-lodger's voice followed me up the stairs, roaring at the landlord to sit down and be matey.

Chapter Three

RONALD BARBER was an Englishman I met coming across in the *Queen Mary* in circumstances that still make me go hot and cold with embarrassment every time I think of it. I was travelling Tourist Third, and one night after dinner, like the crazy idiot I can be on occasion, I thought it would be amusing to gate-crash and watch the dancing in the First Class. The only young man I knew on board was Elmer Guthrie, who was at my table in the tourist dining-room, and he was horrified at the idea—I could have talked him into it, of course, only he had no evening clothes, which settled it. He was so stuffy about my plan, however, that—just to show

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him—I determined to go, even if it meant going alone. I'm like that, I'm afraid—opposition always puts my back up.

I had been to the hairdresser that afternoon and, in my one decent evening frock, a Hattie Carnegie model in black I had picked up cheap, I didn't look too badly. I got through all right, via the promenade deck in the dark, and once in the First Class no one paid any attention to me. I felt pretty conspicuous in the big lounge, however, so I made my way to the forward bar where they were dancing. There were various people sitting on stools at the bar, and I went and stood among them, as though I were waiting for someone. It was very gay and amusing, and some of the frocks were lovely.

Then the disaster happened. In stepping back to let someone pass I knocked over a glass and it went all over a quiet, dark Englishman who was perched on a stool beside me. It fairly drenched his shirt-front, but he was terribly nice about it. I told him he must let me buy him another drink. He protested, but I insisted. It was a champagne-cocktail he had been drinking: I told the barman to give us two champagne-cocktails.

We had a little talk about the ship and the people and, needless to say, I never let on that I was in the Tourist. He was awfully attractive and a very amusing talker, and presently we were having a second round—this time, he said, it was his turn to pay. At last some women came and screamed "Ronnie!" at him from the door, and he said he had to go and play bridge. The barman brought our two checks, and I discovered I hadn't any money. "It's all right, madam," said the barman "Madam can sign!" But this was exactly what Madam couldn't do, as I realized in a flash. I should have to give my stateroom number and the whole thing would come out.

I went absolutely scarlet; I felt a complete fool. My Englishman saw that something was wrong and jumped in quickly. "Hey, George," he told the barman, "those drinks are mine." And he signed the two bills. When we were out in the lounge I stopped him.

"I couldn't sign the bill," I said, "because I'm not in the First Class. I'm Tourist Third."

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He roared with laughter. "Between you and me," he said, "I'd be Tourist Third too, only the office is footing my expenses."

"I owe you six shillings. If you tell me your name, I'll send it to you."

"Don't be idiotic!" he said "I'll tell you my name if you'll tell me yours."

"It's Clarissa Pell!"

"What a nice name! Mine's Ronald Barber! We must do this again!"

But we didn't—that one experience cured me of all further desire to gate crash. I sent him the six shillings, and heard no more.

And then, of all people, he turned up at this pub where I had the bust-up with Guthrie.

Actually, he was the cause of the breach.

Mother, who had old-fashioned ideas, would have been horrified if she had known, which she didn't because I hadn't told her, that I was off on a cycling tour through Devon, unchaperoned with a young man. If she had only seen Elmer!—I guess the only reason I ever thought of teaming up with him was that he was so harmless. He came from some small Middle Western University and was studying to be a teacher—that young man was so full of zeal that sometimes I thought he'd burst. That wasn't the worst of it. He was all out for improving my mind (which isn't difficult) but also my morals (which is a whole-time job for anybody). He didn't appear to mind what people said about me, a single young woman "haring" about England with a young man; but the moment another man as much as looked at me, he started to get possessive, and to lecture me. And with it all he was so darn fussy about small things, dividing up our daily expenses down to the last penny, always rushing away to look at tombstones or change his socks or spray his nose or something—gosh, after three days of it, I was fed up.

Well, we were early for lunch at Breadbury, or whatever this place is called. Elmer was annoyed because I wouldn't go and see the church with him. But it was hot, and I wanted

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to rest. So he went off and, poking about the inn, I came to the bar and the first person I saw was my friend, Ronald Barber, in golf clothes, drinking beer in a tankard and yarning with the barman. He recognized me at once.

"May I hope to die," he said, "if it isn't Gertie the Gate-crasher!"

I was terribly glad to see him again. We had met only that one unforgettable time on board the *Queen Mary*, but the sight of him there, tipped back on his high stool and joshing the stolid British barman along, gave me the oddest sensation—I felt that here was someone I had missed without ever being conscious of it. He was wearing a fearfully old brown tweed suit with a frayed wrist, but he looked just as distinguished as he had looked in his dinner clothes at the *Queen Mary* bar—he had a way of gazing at you out of his dark and rather restless eyes over a very straight nose that was quite irresistible. With his deep tan and close-cropped black hair, his broad shoulders and tweeds and blackened pipe, he impressed me as being a man's man, but with a lot to him besides a good figure and a nice clean open-air appearance. He was gay and debonair, with eyes that laughed at you one minute but could be grave and compelling the next, and an air of not giving a damn for anybody. As I gazed at him blankly for a moment, getting over my surprise at seeing him there, I felt my spirits go shooting up, like those bull market graphs I used to get out when I was working down on Wall Street, and it suddenly occurred to me that here, for the first time in my life, I had met a man who interested me, whom I could really like.

I laughed and said: "In person. Why do we always have to meet in bars?"

"Because we're that sort of chaps, Clarissa!"

"So you remembered my name?"

"You bet. The whole of it. Clarissa Pell. How am I doing, Mr. Pelman?"

"Absolutely tops."

He chuckled and began to recite:

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“I rather like Clarissa Pell,
The reason why, I cannot tell.
But this I know, and know full well,
I rather like Clarissa Pell.’

How about a drink?”

“I’d love one, Barber!”

“First name?”

“Ronald!”

“You get a drink!”

Well, he found me a stool beside his and bought me a gin-and-lime, and soon we were chinning away like old friends. He told me he had come over from the country-house where he was stopping, to play in a foursome at the Breadbury Club. When he heard that I was on my way to Devonshire, he said:

“You’ll be down near where I am. If you’d be interested to see a really wonderful old English house, give me a ring and I’ll get them to ask you to lunch.” He scribbled something on a card and gave it to me. “Can you read the address? It’s Arkwood, Maiden Shapley; telephone, Maiden Shapley seventeen.” Then a klaxon sounded outside. He glanced out of the window to where some people were piling into a very smart-looking Rolls. “I must be off,” he said. “If you’re looking for a place to stop, there’s a very decent pub at Maiden Shapley, ‘The Pheasant’.” Then he rushed away.

There were some boys in the bar, drinking beer and singing and generally ragging. Well, seeing me there alone, they started talking to me and, as one thing leads to another, presently I was having a drink with them. They were all Oxford undergraduates and one of them, a Rhodes scholar, was a Californian. The way it is when Americans get together away from home, before you could count ten, he and I were singing “Frankie and Johnnie” for the benefit of his friends—and in the middle of it, Elmer blew in on us.

Well, to make a long story short, we had a flaming row over lunch. I had looked up Maiden Shapley on the map and found we could get there in time for dinner; I told Elmer I wanted to spend the night at Maiden Shapley and visit Arkwood next

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day. I think what really riled my boy-friend was the fact that he was not included in the invitation, but the fact is I'd forgotten all about him. The end of it all was that I walked out on him, there at the lunch-table. Poor Elmer, I guess I treated him pretty badly. But I felt like a kid coming out of school, I was so glad to be rid of him.

It was cosy in my funny little bedroom under the eaves. True, the sheets were of cotton and pretty scratchy and the blankets weighed a ton. But the fire was in cheerful contrast to the wildness of the weather—it was pleasant to lie in bed, even with a throbbing ankle, and watch the flicker of the flames and hear the wind blustering round the house and the rain drumming on the tiles.

I realized that I had brought this misadventure on myself, through my obstinacy. I hadn't really cared whether I went to lunch at Arkwood or not, until Elmer started laying the law down to me as to how I should behave. Now with my busted foot, it looked as if I might be stuck in this mouldy English village for days. I had planned this bike tour with a view to nursing my funds; out of Aunt Pell's five hundred dollars I reckoned I had enough to spend another fortnight in England, but not living about in hotels—thank heaven I had my return ticket. Aunt Pell, who was father's only sister, lived at St. Louis. After father died, just to keep up with my only living relative except mother, I used to send her a little present at Christmas. She never sent me one back but when she died there it was, as large as life in her will: "To my niece, Clarissa Montgomery Pell, one thousand dollars."

I had the lawyer's letter a couple of days after I lost my job. They may call what happened to the Market in the early summer of '38 the Recession, but to me and a few thousand other girls drawing their twenty-five a week in brokerage firms, it was just the old Depression (with a capital D) over again. Anyway, there was I, at twenty-four, out of about the tenth job I had had in five years.

And then came this little Blue Bird, flying all the way from St. Louis.

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It was mother, bless her heart, who suggested that I should take a holiday and travel. "The time to see the world is when we're young and able to absorb new impressions," she told me. "With people like us, who aren't well-off, memories are often the only things that make life worth while."

I wanted her to come with me. But she wouldn't hear of it. I should spend half my legacy on my trip, and she would keep the remaining five hundred dollars for me to carry me along when I started hunting another job in the Fall.

Between thinking of mother, and of Barber, of those amusing lads at Breadbury and of Elmer, and smiling to myself at the thought of Elmer's face if he had sat in with me on Mr. Danbury's souvenirs in the parlour, I found myself growing drowsy. So, making sure that the matches were within reach, I blew out my candle and let the noise of the wind and the rain lull me to sleep.

I don't know what roused me: I only know that I was wide awake when I heard some small stones rattle on the uncarpeted boards of my room. The next moment there was the tinkle of gravel against glass, not at my window but close by. Without stopping to light my candle I hopped out of bed and ran bare-foot to the window. It was still raining in torrents and the night was black as black—I could see absolutely nothing. Then a clanking sound caught my ear. The window in the adjoining room had opened—my fellow-lodger's room. There was a faint glimmer of light, but it disappeared almost at once. Then silence.

I glanced down. The night was like a curtain, so impenetrable you could not even make out the shapes of the trees. But as my eyes grew accustomed to the dark it seemed to me that something moved below and I was aware of a dim figure, melting into the night. It made no sound: it was there one moment and gone the next.

I stood there by the window, my heart thumping in my ears. The wind swept in savage gusts about the house, the rain hammered on the roof, everywhere about was the murmur of water; but these were the only sounds. Ghost stories I had

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read, tales of old English smuggling inns, crept into my mind. But the figure I had seen, or thought I had seen, had vanished utterly, leaving only the wildness of the night in its wake. And now my neighbour's room was dark.

I shut the window. The house was profoundly silent. I began to think I had imagined the whole thing when, on my way back to bed, I trod on something sharp in my bare feet. It was a small stone, and there were two or three more beside it on the floor. Then somebody *had* been outside, flinging gravel up at Danbury's window, and one or two of the stones had found their way into my room.

At that moment I heard a door creak.

It was my fellow-lodger leaving his room—I could hear his stealthy footsteps in the corridor. The sound stopped and I knew that he was listening at my door—I thanked my lucky stars that I had locked it before getting into bed. The footsteps moved on and pattered off down the stairs. Slipping into dressing-gown and slippers, I opened my door and peered out.

A freezing draught blew along the passage. It seemed to me that voices, cautiously lowered, were speaking below. I stole to the head of the stairs. The inn door stood open and a candle, placed on the table opposite the hat-stand against which my bicycle was resting, guttered wildly in the damp air. I heard a match struck, then a light was kindled in the parlour, and the next minute Danbury, still fully dressed—I remember noticing this particularly—came out of the parlour with a wrap of some kind that he flung down. Then, very softly, he shut the front door, extinguished the candle and re-entered the parlour, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

I tiptoed back to my room. Well, my little man had seemed to be expecting someone—here was his visitor all right. Back in my bedroom, with the door locked, I lit my candle and looked at my watch. How maddening! It had stopped—probably my fall had damaged it. I was wide awake now and the cold had made my ankle ache furiously. I changed the compress and then, since sleep seemed out of the question, fished a pad out of my rucksack, put a fresh log on the fire,

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lit a cigarette and, seated by the fire, started a letter to mother.

I had not written a page when I heard the cry.

It was not a scream—it was more like a whimper, beginning softly and continuing on a rising note but never finishing, as if you were to bang your finger, start to say "Ouch!" and think better of it. I jumped up, but I was barely on my feet when I felt the floor shake as the heavy front door below was swung to. Then silence.

I unlocked my door again. Everything in the house seemed to be profoundly still and, below stairs, all was dark. Suddenly a faint, panting shuffling sound reached my ears—it was as though an old hound were dragging itself up. I peeped over. At first I could see nothing, but I was aware that someone, something, was laboriously crawling up on all fours. I was cold with fear: for the moment I simply could not budge from the spot. Then a car whooshed by along the village street and its headlights, flashing briefly through the fanlight over the front door, showed me my fellow lodger grovelling there, half way up the flight.

I called out: "What on earth are you doing? Why don't you go to bed?" But he only made a sort of growling noise in his throat.

I thought then that he was ill and ran back for my candle.

"What's the matter?" I cried, letting the light shine down upon him from the head of the staircase. "Are you ill?"

On that, with a sort of convulsive effort, he raised his face to me. It was ghastly, with haggard eyes, and mouth piteously straining for breath. Suddenly his hands clawed at his breast, he toppled forward and rolled down the flight to the bottom.

It was then that, seeing the trail of blood he left in his wake, I screamed.

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Chapter Four

I SUPPOSE a Victorian miss would have swooned. I didn't, and I was ashamed of my scream as soon as I had let it out. I told myself that, there at the foot of the stairs, a man was bleeding to death—I thought he had broken a blood-vessel or something. I ran down, raised him up where he lay on his face beside my muddy bicycle, and turned him over—he was pretty light. I had never seen anyone dead before, but I knew about him instinctively, he rested so limply in my arms with only the whites of his eyes showing—it was horrible. There was blood all down the front of his jacket. My hands were red with it. I felt rather sick.

I laid him down and sprang to my feet in a panic. I would have to rouse the landlord: then I realized that I had no idea where he slept. At the same moment I saw him, a gnome-like figure in undervest and trousers, emerging with a candle from a door at the end of the hall.

He scowled when he perceived me. "Wot's goin' forrard 'ere?" he rumbled in a voice thick with sleep. "Can't a body get 'is rest?" Then he caught sight of the body on the floor and all the blood about, and started. His glance swung suspiciously to me.

"Someone came for him and threw stones at his window," I said. "I heard him go down. He was speaking to someone at the front door—they went into the parlour together. Then there was a sort of cry, and I came out of my room to find him trying to crawl up the stairs. He seems to have had a hæmorrhage or something. I think he's dead."

"Dead?"

The hump-back set his candle on the bottom step and, going forward, stooped over the body. "Aye, 'e's dead, roight enough!" he agreed, stepping back and looking about him. "Crikey, 'e bled loike a stuck shoat."

But the spectacle of those sightless eyes staring at the ceiling, and the pool of blood welling out to touch the very

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tyres of my bicycle leaning there, was too much for me, and I turned my head away. Then I heard an exclamation. The landlord's mis-shapen back was once more bending forward. He had shifted the corpse on to its face again.

"'Æmorrhage, you say, missie? This bean't no 'æmorrhage as takes a body natural. Lookee 'ere!" His thick finger traced a tear in the back of the dead man's coat. "That wor a knoife done that!"

"A knife?"

"That's wot Oi said, and fair atwixt the shoulders."

"You mean, he was stabbed? Murdered?"

"Aye, shorely." He was glancing about on the ground. "But Oi doan' see no knoife. Did you pick wan up?"

"I? Certainly not."

He grunted, shooting his tortoise-like neck at me. "A noice sart o' think to 'appen on respeckable premises. Not to mention 'is reckoning at the bar wot's owin'! Oi should oughter a-known better than to take in a tramp off the roads loike 'e wor. Well, it's a job fer police, Oi reckon. Boide 'ee there by un an' moind 'ee doan' touch nothin' whoile Oi fetches constable."

"But you can't leave me alone in the house with him!" I protested, aghast. "You can ring up the police, can't you?"

But I was reckoning without rural England.

"There bean't but two phones in village," he replied stolidly. "One's at Post Office and t'other at Dr. 'Ammond's. Oi won't be a minute gorn—Jem Savage lives on'y a piece up street."

I was already half way up the stairs. "I'll be in my room."

The first thing I did was to lock the door, the next to wash my hands—I shuddered when I saw the colour of the water in the basin. In the circumstances I thought I had better get into my clothes again. Presently, there were voices and footsteps below stairs, and after a little I heard Bunting calling me.

They had spread a rug over the body, where it sprawled just inside the inn door. The village cop was in the parlour, a strapping young giant, as beautiful as a Ouida guardsman, with curly hair and the cutest little blond moustache—he quite took my breath away. He was in rubber boots and a

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navy-blue mac, with pink-and-white pyjamas appearing coyly beneath. He apologized for what he called his "rig," blushing a good deal; he was too enchanting.

He was quite official with me, however, wanting to know all about me, when and where I landed, and I had to fetch my passport. Then I was allowed to tell my story. It was a slow business, for he wrote it all down, word by word, in his notebook. Both he and Bunting were much intrigued by my account of Danbury's visitor. I explained to him about Danbury asking me, when I first arrived, whether I was expecting anyone, and it then appeared he had informed the landlord that someone might be inquiring for him.

I discovered from Bunting that Danbury had arrived on foot and that, beyond saying he had come from London, gave no information about himself or as to where he was going; since he described himself as a steward, the landlord had assumed he was making for Plymouth to find a ship. Seeing that he was able to pay for his room in advance, Bunting had asked no questions and taken him in. On this I told them what the little man had said about travelling "incognito," and suggested that Danbury was an assumed name—all of which the constable conscientiously put down in his book.

In recalling what I could remember of the stories I had heard from him, I mentioned that he was the survivor of some big shipping disaster. My attractive cop immediately wanted to know the name of the ship, but I had to confess that, although I had seen it in an old newspaper clipping he had shown me, I had not particularly noted it.

"It wasn't any ship I'd ever heard of before—I mean, like the *Morro Castle*," I said. "Anyhow, you'll find the name in that clipping—it's in the wallet in his pocket."

The policeman shook his head. "There worn't no wallet on 'im w'en Oi went through 'is pockets jes' now, miss. But Oi've yet to search 'is room—mebbe 'e left it there."

We were now interrupted by the arrival of a bland, red-faced man, who proved to be the village doctor. Savage and the landlord went out to him, and I heard them conferring in low tones over the body. My good-looking policeman must

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have told the doc about my damaged ankle, for after a bit the doc came in to me.

"So you're American, eh?" he said. "A terrible experience for you, my dear. I hear you've sprained your ankle. Let's have a look at it."

I pulled off my shoe and stocking, and he examined the sprain.

"If you can hobble as far as my house after breakfast, I'll bandage it for you. But I warn you, you'll probably have to rest up for a day or two. It's the red house, where the road makes a turn—Hammond's the name. Now if I were you, I'd try to get some sleep. Good night to you!"

My friendly policeman raising no objection, I returned to my room. He only pointed out that the Chief Constable was likely to be round first thing and would certainly want to see me. He and the landlord were behind me as I climbed the stairs. They went into the dead man's room, and I into mine.

It may seem callous of me, but I was so worn out, what with my wanderings in the rain in the first part of the evening and the subsequent events of the night, that on getting back to bed I fell asleep almost at once. I had scarcely closed my eyes, or so it seemed to me, when Bunting came pounding at my door.

"Git up, missie!" he said. "You're wanted below stairs."

It was broad daylight and a lovely sparkling morning.

On descending the staircase, I perceived that the body had been removed and that a stalwart young woman in a burlap apron was swabbing out the hall. Constable Savage, looking more than ever like a young god in a smart blue uniform, was sunning himself on the porch for the benefit of a rabble of villagers and small children grouped under the inn-sign and staring open-mouthed at the house.

On perceiving me, he saluted briskly and, saying: "Chief Constable'd loike a word with 'ee," ushered me into the parlour.

Two men sat at the table eating bacon and eggs and talking to a huge policeman in a braided black uniform-coat. I naturally took this officer, a fresh-faced individual with sandy

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hair, to be the Chief Constable, but one of the men at the table, a fat, baldish person in a grey suit, said: "Sorry to trouble you thus early, Miss Pell, but I'm Major Hendersley, the Chief Constable, and I'm inquiring into this tragic business of last night. You were the first to discover the murdered man, I believe?"

"He *was* murdered, then?"

"He was stabbed in the back. Have you had breakfast?"

I told him I never ate breakfast. If I might have a cup of coffee . . .

The other man at the breakfast table chuckled. He was a nice-looking old boy in plus-fours, with very pink cheeks and blue eyes with the merriest twinkle.

"Take my tip, Miss Pell," he said, "and stick to tea. I shouldn't like you to derive your impressions of this country by the sort of coffee you get at the average English inn."

"You're telling me!" I answered, and they all laughed.

Major Hendersley said, indicating the large policeman: "This is Superintendent Maggs, from Maiden Shapley, who's in charge of the inquiry, and," pointing to the man in plus-fours, "my friend, Mr. Treadgold."

"You saw nothing of a knife, or any weapon, I understand, miss?" asked the Superintendent.

I shook my head. "That was the first thing the landlord asked me. Do you mean to say no weapon's been found?"

"That's right. Nor any sign of the wallet you spoke of."

"But he had it at supper. He brought it out to show me this clipping about the shipwreck he'd been in."

The Superintendent heaved up his brawny shoulders. "It wasn't on him when the constable went over him, and it wasn't in his room, neither."

"Maybe the murderer got it," said I, looking at the Major.

"That's the inference, certainly," observed the Chief Constable.

Meanwhile, Mr. Treadgold had rung and Bunting brought me my tea.

The Major had a paper with him that seemed to contain my statement to Constable Savage. Referring to it now, he asked

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me much the same questions as I had answered before. "You say the deceased gave you to understand he'd seen better days?" was one of his questions.

I nodded. "He told me he was in Florida during the land boom when, you know, people became millionaires overnight."

"On paper," Mr. Treadgold put in gravely and twinkled his eyes at me. He had a bland manner but his air was very spry.

"He was talking about having his ups and downs," I went on, "and he said something about being nearer the top than the bottom at that very moment, if we could see into the future, or words to that effect."

The Superintendent grunted. "Said that, did he? You didn't mention it to the officer, did you?"

"I just remembered it."

The Chief Constable shrugged his shoulders. "Sounds like blackmail to me, though who's going to blackmail anybody in a dead-and-alive hole like Burstowe . . ."

"Blackmail's a rum thing, Major. One thing's established—he was expecting to meet someone here."

"Someone he didn't know by sight," Mr. Treadgold amended in his quiet voice.

"How do you make that out?" the Superintendent wanted to know.

"She said he asked her if she was expecting anyone, didn't she? Therefore, he obviously did not know who would be calling to see him."

Major Hendersley glanced at Maggs. "It's a point, Maggs."

The other flushed, but made no rejoinder.

"A further observation or, rather, query," Mr. Treadgold persisted. "Does the fact that he tackled Miss Pell imply that it was a woman he was expecting?"

The Superintendent listened with some impatience. "You're not suggesting that a woman did this, I hope?" he objected. "Because, if you'd put in 'eight-and-twenty year in the Force as I have, you'd know that women don't use the knife—at least, not in this country." He turned to me again. "I suppose you've no doubt in your mind, miss, that the party as threw

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the stones up at the window was identical with the individual the deceased let in by the front door?"

"I shouldn't care to go as far as that," I said. "Remember, I had only the merest glimpse of this person, whoever it was under my window, and the second time I didn't see him at all, but only Danbury, when he came out of the parlour to blow out the candle and close the front door."

Mr. Treadgold cocked his head on one side; he reminded me of a large, friendly robin.

"This figure you saw, you told the constable it was like a moving shadow, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What sort of shadow was it?"

"Just a shadow, a dark shape."

"My dear young lady, even a shadow has a form." He stood up and moved round the table. "If you got a glimpse of me, for example, in a very dim light, you'd probably receive the impression of an old buffer whose nether garments ended at the knee—ergo, that I was wearing some kind of breeches, or plus-fours. Right?" He smiled at me engagingly.

"I suppose so," said I, smiling back at him.

"Very well, then. Now a man bare-headed in an ordinary suit has a silhouette that's quite different from that of a man in a hat and overcoat. Then again, a woman is usually smaller than a man, slimmer and more slenderly made. If a man seen in profile is more or less straight up and down, a woman, generally speaking, is more waisted—say—like an hour-glass."

"I'm afraid I didn't see this person clearly enough to say whether it was a man or a woman. It had no particular shape. It was like a cloaked figure."

"Ah!"

His exclamation cut across my words. "Now we're getting somewhere," he said. "You've answered voluntarily the question I was reluctant to ask, for fear of influencing your mind. You've hit upon the one case in which the silhouette of man or woman, no matter how they're dressed, is identical, that's to say, when they're enveloped in a flowing garment like a loose wrap or shawl." He looked at me expectantly.

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"I'm sure I can't tell you what the apparition was wearing," I answered. "It was gone in a flash."

Superintendent Maggs gave Mr. Treadgold a quizzing glance. "Maybe it was you she saw, sir. That Inverness cape of yours I've seen you wear when it's wet, would fit the bill."

Mr. Treadgold laughed. "What about our postman? He wears a waterproof cape when it's rainy. An overcoat slung from the shoulders, a rug wrapped about one as a protection against the rain—all these tend to blur the silhouette, as in the case of this mysterious individual seen by Miss Pell. As a matter of fact, there is another cape beside mine right here in Burstowe. What's the name of that secretary woman of Disford's?"

"Miss Verge," said the Major.

"Well, Miss Verge has an Italian officer's cape. I've seen her wearing it up at the golf course."

"Then maybe we'd best charge Miss Verge," said the Superintendent.

I had the impression that the Superintendent did not like Mr. Treadgold much: his jokes against him were rather pointed.

"Before you think of charging anybody, you'll have to establish the dead man's identity," Mr. Treadgold pointed out.

"That's what I'm thinking myself, with respect, sir. But it's easier said than done. From what he told the young lady here, 'Danbury' seems to be an assumed name. There's nothing in the battered little attaché-case he left in his room to help us, and his duds are of the cheapest ready-made kind such as are sold by the million in this country every year, and nothing's marked."

"Perhaps the laundries . . ." began the Major.

"We'll circularize them, of course."

"Maybe the lab. people can pick up a line from his gear, the dust in his pockets—that sort of thing?"

"Maybe. But I'm not sanguine. Nowadays the roads are full of down-and-outs like this chap, looking for work—these homeless men are the deuce and all to trace. It makes one want to stand up and holler for a compulsory national register,

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it do indeed. I don't know whether you have any suggestion, Major."

"We could send his picture to the newspapers, I suppose. And since he was a steward, maybe the dockyard police at the ports could help us." He glanced at Mr. Treadgold. "What do you say, H.B.?"

"The soul of man," said Mr. Treadgold, "has shorter ways of furnishing itself with knowledge than we generally assume." He rolled this off with the self-righteous air people unconsciously assume when they stun you with a quotation.

"Oh, my sainted aunt," groaned the Chief Constable, "not 'Tristram Shandy' at eight o'clock in the morning?"

"And why not?" his friend retorted mildly. "It's the wisest book I know."

"Excuse me," said the Superintendent. "I want a word with Bunting,"—I had the impression that he had had all of Mr. Treadgold he could stand. He clattered out.

The Major gave a dry laugh. "I should inform you, Miss Pell, that my friend, Treadgold, has simplified his reading. Since leaving school at some incredibly remote date, he has restricted himself to one book and one book only. *Tristram Shandy*—if you know it."

Memories of our literature class at Miss Haydon's flitted across my mind.

"Smollett, is it?" I hazarded.

Mr. Treadgold closed his eyes as though in pain.

"Sterne, my dear young lady—Sterne."

"He knows it by heart," Hendersley went on. "From morning to night he does nothing but quote from it. He's worse than a preacher with his Bible."

"We might at least apply the principles of the passage I just cited to the present case, Jack," said his friend, perking up, "by looking into the matter of this shipping disaster Danbury spoke of. If she could recall the name of the ship it might give us a line on him."

"It wasn't the *Titanic*, was it?" questioned the Major.

I shook my head. "No. I should have remembered the *Titanic*. It wasn't a name I'd ever heard of."

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"Was it the *Egypt*?"

"That wasn't it."

"The *Drummond Castle*? The *Vestris*?" Mr. Treadgold prompted.

I shook my head again.

"The *Lusitania*?" suggested the Chief Constable with an air of triumph, and I had to tell him that few Americans were likely to forget that name.

"If I heard the name, I think I'd know it again," I told them.

The Major was filling his pipe. "How long did you think of staying at Burstowe, Miss Pell?" he asked me.

"It depends on the doctor. He wanted me to go and see him after breakfast. I thought I'd go round there now, if it isn't too early."

"Ah, the sprained ankle, to be sure. Hammond's an early bird—he'll be up and about all right. But whatever he says, I'll have to ask you to remain on for a day or two. Until the inquest, at any rate—you'll be wanted to give evidence."

Superintendent Maggs poked his florid face in at the door.

"Might I have a word with you, Major?"

"Excuse me!" The Chief Constable bustled out.

The idea that I should be required to appear at the inquest had not occurred to me. I suppose I must have looked pretty fussed about it, for Mr. Treadgold said: "Don't worry. There's nothing to be afraid of. I play golf with the Coroner—I'll see that he doesn't badger you." He looked at me meditatively. "You know, I don't much like the idea of your staying in this sordid little pot-house. I've some friends here who'd probably be glad to put you up. Would you like me to ask them?"

Ever since the Major had told me I should have to remain on at Burstowe, I had been turning over in my mind Ronald Barber and his offer to get me asked to lunch at Arkwood, trying to make up my mind whether to ring him up and explain my position. Mr. Treadgold's appealed to me as the perfect solution, and I jumped at it—I could call Barber from this house where I was going to stay with Mr. Treadgold's friends.

"That would be terribly kind of you, if you don't think it'd be an imposition."

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He smiled. "I've a bungalow on the golf course at the end of the village—I'm down here for a month's golfing holiday. I'd put you up myself, but it's a bachelor establishment, and I don't know what the old tabbies would say."

"It's most awfully good of you to take pity on a complete stranger."

"Not in the least. I used to work in New York and I still go over two or three times a year on business. I've many American friends and it'd be a real gratification to me to feel I was repaying even a tiny fraction of the many kindnesses I've received in your country. Perhaps, when your ankle's better, we might play a little golf together and so combine what a famous author calls a point of convenience with a point of pleasure?"

I laughed. "*Tristram Shandy*, is it?"

He beamed. "*Tristram Shandy* it is! I've a car outside. I'll run you along to Dr. Hammond, and by the time you're through with him, I shall hope to have everything fixed up."

He twinkled his blue eyes at me and led the way outside to where a big coupé was parked. I felt I was going to like Mr. Mr. Treadgold a lot. Until he appeared I felt pretty forlorn; but there was a solid reliability about this large and placid Englishman that I found to be eminently consoling.

Chapter Five

BURSTOWE was a sweet little village. I loved the white-washed cottages with their warm brown thatch and small gardens glowing with flowers—one couldn't picture murder slinking in there among all that rustic loveliness. Mr. Treadgold dropped me at the doctor's and went off to the Post Office to telephone. It was only a step to the inn: I told him I could manage to hobble back.

Dr. Hammond lived in a solid Georgian house, shabby but full of atmosphere. He was mixing drugs in his rather grubby

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dispensary when I was shown in. He chatted about the murder while he bathed and bandaged my ankle. His theory was that it was a political crime.

"All kinds of rough chaps who were out with the International Brigade in Spain or running the insurgent blockade in British ships are drifting back to this country and, from all I hear, this poor devil seems to have been of the same type. If you ask me, he was followed down from London. The cloak and knife—they suggest Spain."

This gave me an entirely fresh slant on the murder. "But why should they kill him?"

The doc shrugged his shoulders: "Labour trouble, a personal grudge? Or he may have been a spy—I don't know. They don't set much store by human life in Spain—if you can believe what you read in the newspapers. The inquest is to-morrow, but I understand that Superintendent Maggs will ask for a week's adjournment pending inquiries—it appears they know next to nothing about the dead man."

I laughed. "Well," I said, "you've certainly given me a new angle. I was beginning to suspect the landlord. He looks capable of almost anything, though I couldn't imagine why he should have to go outside and bring Danbury down by throwing stones at his window."

Dr. Hammond chuckled. "Poor old Bunting! He looks a proper villain, don't he? But he's not a bad chap, when you know him, and his family has been settled here in the village for centuries. He lost his only son in the war—you'll see his name on our War Cross. The Buntings and the Sedgwick Arms are by way of being an institution at Burstowe. For years there were Buntings in the service of the Earls of Sedgwick who used to have Arkwood where the Disfords are now."

"Tell me," I said, "do you happen to know a man called Ronald Barber who's staying at Arkwood?"

He shook his head. "Can't say I do. But the Disfords always have a lot of guests—they come and go. It's a magnificent place—you ought to take a look at it while you're here. You'll have to rest up with this ankle of yours for a couple of days, you know. Are you going to stop on at the inn?"

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"Mr. Treadgold thought he might be able to fix up with some friends of his to take me. Do you know Mr. Treadgold?"

He chuckled. "Who doesn't know Uncle Toby?"

"Uncle Toby?"

"It's a character in *Tristram Shandy*—a book he's eternally quoting." He chuckled again. "He'll be walking on air when he hears about this business at Bunting's—it's right up his street."

"I was wondering about Mr. Treadgold. He came to the inn with the Chief Constable this morning. Is he a detective?"

"He's a tailor."

"A tailor?"

"He's head of one of the oldest and most exclusive London tailoring concerns—Bowl, Treadgold and Flack, of Savile Row: they make for all the nobbs. But he's also an enthusiastic amateur criminologist and I'm told a very good one, though he doesn't advertise it. So he was round at the Sedgwicke Arms with the Major, was he? Well, well! Of course, they're regular cronies. He rents the Major's bungalow, alongside where the Hendersleys live on Burstowe golf course. It'd be the Hendersleys who'll be putting you up, I dare say?"

I told him I didn't know. Rather shortly, for I began to see that the doc was a good deal of a gossip.

"Oh, well, he knows everybody round here, although he's been down only a couple of weeks. He's what you Yankees call 'a good mixer.'"

I left him then, after he had given me a bottle of lotion and taken five shillings off me. When I got back to the inn I perceived a tiny battered car at the door. A slim dark girl dangled trousered legs from one of the rails of the porch. She jumped down as I appeared and came out to me.

"You must be Clarissa Pell, aren't you?" she said—she had the rather sing-song drawl of so many well-bred Englishwomen.

"I'm Clarissa Pell," I told her. She was homely, but in a not unattractive way, with fine brown skin, and nice teeth: well groomed, too, in her blue slacks and bright Painsley scarf.

"Mr. Treadgold rang us up and told us about you. He

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thought we might put you up. My sister—Lady Disford, you know—will be delighted. What a terrible experience for you—I'm dying to hear about it. I'm Rosemary Wreith."

The name of Disford struck a chord in my memory.

"Do you live at a place called Arkwood?" I asked.

"That's right."

"I believe I know a man who's staying with you—Ronald Barber."

She was quite unmoved. "So you know Ronnie! How amusing! He went off early to play golf with Glenn and Tris and Elvira."

These names were so much Greek to me, but she did not appear to notice.

"I think it's terribly kind of you—of your sister—to take me in," I said. "You're sure it's convenient?"

She laughed—her laugh was hard. "There are only about forty bedrooms at Arkwood—they'll squash you in somewhere."

"The only thing is, I've no clothes except a pair of slacks and this suit I'm wearing."

"But you have some in London?"

"Oh, sure."

"We'll telephone for them—we'll fit you out with a frock to wear at dinner to-night. Have you got a bag?"

"A rucksack in my room."

"Don't trouble. Quasimodo'll get it."

"Quasimodo?"

"The Hump-back of Notre-Dame—it's what Eric Clayden calls Bunting." She opened the inn door and hollered: "Hey, Bunting or somebody!"

The hump-back put his sour face round the door.

"Miss Pell wants her bag—she's leaving," she informed him. "What about your bill?" she asked me as he withdrew.

"He made me pay in advance."

"What damned sauce!"

My eye fell on my bicycle. "I was forgetting my bike—it's punctured."

"It'll never fit on my measly little bus. But don't worry—

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we'll send one of the footmen down. He'll repair it and ride it back."

"One of the footmen!" I felt a little overwhelmed, it sounded so grand. A footstep in the passage made me turn my head. Mr. Treadgold beamed at us from the doorway.

"Why, hullo, Uncle Toby!" said the Wreith girl. "Do you want to come along and lunch up at the house?"

"I'm dining with you to-night."

"What do you make of this business? The cloaked assassin—isn't it too thrilling? Is it true what everybody's saying, that it was a Spaniard who did it?"

"Well, Spaniards are used to muffling themselves up in blankets against the wet and, of course, there's the poniard. But we're likely to know more when they've established who this poor chap really is."

Then Quasimodo appeared with my rucksack and waterproof, and we went out to the car.

Chapter Six

I HAVE read somewhere that a sudden nervous shock tends to brisk up the perceptive faculties. I had gone through a pretty grim experience and the effect was to leave me in a frame of mind which seems to me, on looking back, to have been abnormally sensitive to outer influences.

I found myself curiously interested in the Wreith girl. In the ordinary way, seeing how cool and self-contained she was, I would probably have thought her just another Englishwoman, friendly enough, but faintly dismayed at having a wild American on her hands. But in my peculiarly analytical mood of that morning I was aware that her languor, her carefully restrained air, was chiefly a shield. She was no older than I, that was certain, and there was the love of life in the curve of her lips and good humour in the upward tilt of her rather large mouth. There was a sort of grim determination about her,

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however, that puzzled me and her eyes, when she thought she was not observed, were tragic. It occurred to me that she was unhappy.

Arkwood lay back from a metalled road, set between high hedges, that snaked its way up from the crossroads outside the village. Every corner was blind, but the Wreith girl took them all impartially at a level fifty. I was relieved when at last our funny little car slowed down at iron gates flanked by tall pillars surmounted by some kind of lions holding shields between their paws, and the toot of our klaxon brought a woman in a white apron from the rose-covered lodge to open them for us.

Once within the gates my companion slackened speed. The park was lovely, wild rather than formal, with brick-red rocks showing among the bracken and the most enormous trees. The avenue wound through it for miles, as it seemed to me—there appeared to be no end to it. At one place where a wood came to the edge of the drive, a gorgeous cock pheasant strolled unconcernedly across the roadway almost under our wheels, and farther on a group of fallow-deer in a hollow watched us with their bright eyes, the prettiest things. Here and there, as the drive twisted in and out of the great gnarled oaks, there was a glimpse of water shining in the morning sun. Except for the hum of the car and the chatter of the birds, there was not a sound—the atmosphere of peace was indescribable. It was all so green, so warmly fragrant, so still—a corner of Shakespeare's England.

The Wreith girl had not spoken since we left the village.

"What a heavenly place!" I said. "Dr. Hammond told me the Earls of Sedgwicke had it once. Did Lord Disford inherit it?"

She shook her head. "He bought it from the executors last year after Jerry Sedgwicke broke his neck, motor-racing in France—he was the last Earl in the direct line. My brother-in-law only rented it up till then. By the way, he's not a lord, though I dare say he'll be made a peer one day. For the present he's only a knight—he got it in the New Year Honours this year for presenting Maiden Shapley with a new hospital:

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Glenn's done a lot for the county. All these titles bother Americans, don't they?"

"Have you ever been to America?" I asked.

She gave one of her brusque nods. "I worked for two years in the States."

"Lately?"

"Three years ago. Then Marcia—that's my sister—married Glenn and—well, I let myself be persuaded to come home."

"You live with your sister?"

She uttered her harsh laugh. "Not much. I'm only here for my holiday. I'm a working woman. I work in a book-shop in London—Oxford Street."

"How did you like America?"

"All right."

"What were you doing?"

She laughed. "What didn't I do—at first? I was in a Madison Avenue beauty-parlour for a bit, then I was a nursery-governess. At different times I worked in the department stores and once, when things were particularly tough, I took a job as chambermaid in a hotel. I had a good post at the finish, though. Advertising. But my sister wanted me over here, so I quit. Gr-r-r!"

She sounded the horn and a rabbit scuttled out of our path. "There's a regular plague of rabbits at Arkwood," she remarked. "Sometimes some of us take a gun out before dinner or at the full moon and pop a few off. Do you like shooting?"

"I never tried."

"We're not much good. Laura Verge is the best of us—she's my brother-in-law's secretary. Glenn says she's a natural shot. Do you play golf?"

"I play when I have the chance. But I'm no good."

"My brother-in-law's crazy about golf. He practically supports the Burstowe course"—her arm described an arc—"it's over there, at the back of the lake. Anybody with a handicap of twelve or under can get invited to Arkwood. The house is usually crawling with golfers."

"Has your sister any children?"

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She shook her head.

"Is your brother-in-law in business?"

She nodded. "Finance. Company promotion—that kind of stuff. He's supposed to have the wizard touch—whatever that may mean. Here's the house now—you'll get a glimpse of the quadrangle just round the cedar."

We seemed to be approaching the house from the rear. Between the tremendous, flattened branches of an enormous cedar of Lebanon I perceived an inner court smoothly green with turf, open on one side and enclosed on the others by two wings projecting from the main body of the house, with old brick warmly red and lines of windows winking in the sun. Now the bend of the avenue brought us in sight of a grove of tall trees and in between, a double line of box-hedges cut stiffly into all kinds of fantastic figures—a man with a bow, a lion, a peacock—and behind, towards the stately pile of the mansion, terraced gardens making a splash of colour against the glint of row upon row of glasshouses. Green lawns—the brightest emerald you ever saw—rolled up to the main entrance, a great colonnaded porch such as you find in our South, but of stone, not wood. There was a terrace facing full south on one side: on the other, a clock tower with gold hands and black face poked its head from a cluster of red-roofed stables.

"The façade's Inigo Jones—it's supposed to be his best period," my companion explained as we swept up to the porch. "Hullo, here's Laura Verge now." The brakes shrieked, the gravel flew and we stopped with a jerk. "If she takes a fancy to you, maybe she'll let you go out with her after the conies," she added.

To the left of the porch a stone balustrade gay with hydrangeas bordered the broad terrace I had observed on our way up to the house. Through an opening guarded by great vases trailing rambler roses a middle-aged woman advanced. She had a floppy straw hat on her arm, a basket filled with roses in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other. She was rather plain and dumpy, but her tailored suit was well cut and her feet, notwithstanding her sensible, low-heel shoes, small

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and trim. With her was a fair young man in jodhpurs and a tweed jacket, with a faintly bored air.

"Laura," said the Wreith girl, "it's Miss Pell."

Miss Verge's rather homely countenance broke into a warm smile. I found myself liking her on the spot. Her mouth was tight and firm and she had a very capable air; but her features, while full of character, were very kindly. "Why," she exclaimed in a voice full and warm, "you're only a child. I don't know why, but from what Mr. Treadgold said on the telephone, I expected you to be a regular American school-marm with horn-rimmed specs. My poor dear, what a dreadful experience for you! Have they caught the murderer yet?"

"I guess not."

She laughed. "They never will, if it's left to that solemn ass, Superintendent What's-his-name. And Jack Hendersley isn't so long on brains, either. Lady Disford's around somewhere—she's dying to meet you. The others have gone to play golf."

"Fancy, Laura, she knows Ronnie," put in the Wreith girl in her trailing voice.

The secretary beamed at me. "Well, well, then at least you won't feel yourself altogether among strangers. You met him in America, I expect. He's only just back."

"As a matter of fact, I met him on the boat, coming over."

"You're going into the Green Room—I wonder if it's ready. Eric, just ring that bell for Haviland, will you?" The young man in jodhpurs obediently tugged an iron bell-pull hanging down beside the porch. "Have you any luggage?"

"Only a rucksack. My trunk's in London."

"We must get it down. The butler shall telephone for it. Here, lend me a pencil, somebody!"

The young man in jodhpurs produced a very elegant gold pencil and the back of an envelope and I wrote down the name of my modest Bloomsbury hotel. A butler, lanky and elderly, had meanwhile emerged from under the porch, followed by a tall footman in claret-coloured livery, who took charge of my rucksack, and there was some palaver between Miss Verge and the butler about my trunk.

"Laura, my pet," said the young man in jodhpurs.

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"What is it now, Eric?" replied Miss Verge, turning round.

"I question whether Miss Pell, a stranger to our shores, is already acquainted with the curiously debased standard of manners prevalent at our English country seats."

The secretary laughed. "I may as well tell you, my dear," she informed me, "that Mr. Clayden talks a great deal of nonsense. Fortunately, we're used to it and don't take him seriously. I advise you to do the same."

"I protest!" cried the young man. "You're being monstrously unfair. I was never more serious in my life. I am passionately anxious to address our guest, but am only too painfully aware that to do so unIntroduced would be to violate every canon of social behaviour respected and—and—and upheld in the great republic from which she hails."

Miss Verge chuckled. "Sorry. Miss Pell—Mr. Eric Clayden."

The young man bowed. "Pleased to meet you, Miss Pell," he said gravely.

He was a narrow-chested young man with a good deal of unstudied elegance in his well-cut riding things. His permanent air was faintly quizzing and his eyes, rather small and set close together over a large aquiline nose, were sharp and intelligent.

"How do you do?" I said. He took a deep breath.

"Now that the conventions have been preserved, would you mind returning my pencil?" he remarked.

"Sorry," I said, handing it back to him.

"Don't mention it. But our country owes your country so much money that for the moment I was a trifle anxious."

I laughed outright at that. Then I saw his face change. He was looking upward. Turning about I saw that a window above the porch had been opened. A charmingly pretty face was visible above a pair of dimpled elbows planted on the window-sill. It was the Wreith girl's face, but with every feature softer and daintier, as though a finger had rubbed them over in the mould. Where the one had character and strength, the other's expression was sweet and appealing, with lips that pouted like a Greuze, and eyes dark and long-fringed. The Wreith girl called up at the window raucously: "Come down, Marcy! Miss Pell's here!"

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The head disappeared. The butler and footman had gone into the house. Miss Verge slipped her arm into mine.

"The maids are still up in your room—the notice was rather short," she said. Her bright black eyes bored sympathetically into mine. "You look all in, you poor thing, and no wonder. I'll tell you what we're going to do with you. We'll find you a long chair on the terrace where it's quiet. At this hour of the day there won't be a soul to bother you and you can sleep if you want to. And if you don't feel like coming in to lunch, you can have it on a tray outside."

Then Lady Disford came out.

I felt a little shy with her, she was so self-possessed, so very much the *châtelaine* of that lovely house. She was terribly smart in the country style that becomes the average Englishwoman so well, in a jumper suit that simply shouted "Chanel" and marvellously cut little lizard brogues. She wore a short string of pearls—and oh, dear, they were beauties! She was young and fresh and as nicely made as she was pretty; the clinging type by contrast with her sister—so much more aggressive. But for all her appealing softness, a firm little chin suggested that she had a will of her own. Her manner was rather vague, as though she were used to having everything done for her—I thought she might be a trifle spoiled.

Her greeting was simple and kindly and when I tried to make a little speech of thanks to her and her husband for coming to my rescue, she cut me off. "I think it was a marvellous idea of Uncle Toby's, simply marvellous," she said, "and I do hope you'll be comfortable with us and rest your foot and forget all about this horrible experience. Laura was going to fix you up with a nice room—the Green Room, isn't it, Laura?—and if there's anything you want, you'll ask, won't you? And now, if you'll forgive me, I have to go and talk to the head gardener. You know," she went on to Miss Verge, "Glenn complained again about the peaches we had at dinner last night. If Curtis can't do better than that—heaven knows the gardens cost enough——!"

She gave us a bright nod and moved off towards the terrace. Clayden would have gone with her, but she stopped and said:

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"No, Eric, you go and have your ride. Curtis is Scotch and serious-minded. I'm sure your sense of humour won't appeal to him in the least."

"I deny it *in toto*," Clayden declared. "Don't forget I had a Scottish grandmother. Curtis and I understand one another perfectly."

"I'm going to tick the old duffer off and I won't have you playing the fool!"

"But Marcy, *darling*, if I swear not to open my lips—not even at the spectacle of you grappling with yon auld Hieland mon!"

"No, Eric!"

He made a sour face like a crotchety dotard. "Twa-an' thirty year," he rasped in a terrific Scottish accent, "I had the honour to sairve as heid-gar-rdener to his late lor-r-rdship's father an' I dinna ca' to mind in all that time onny occasion on which his lor-r-rdship the Airle, or his leddy, the Countess, saw fit to pass streectures on the manner in which I pair-for-rmed ma du'ies." On which he wagged his head solemnly and cleared his throat with painful realism.

We all roared—he was really very funny.

"Eric, you idiot, stop it at once!" Lady Disford cried, laughing. "Suppose old Curtis should hear you!" She fluttered her hand to me. "I'll see you at lunch. I'm simply dying with curiosity to hear about this dreadful business at Bunting's." She tripped off across the grass.

I happened to look at Eric Clayden. He had quit his fooling and was staring moodily after the departing figure as dainty and as fragile as a piece of Dresden china. The expression on his face startled me—there was something devouring in it, as though he were reluctant to let her out of his sight. He caught me staring at him and slipped into his frivolous manner on the spot.

"'Murder at the Sedgwicke Arms'—what a title for a thriller, eh?" he remarked in a casual voice. "Uncle Toby told Laura that you had supper with this poor devil. An out-of-work steward, wasn't he? What's the police theory about it all?"

But Miss Verge intervened. "You leave her alone, Eric.

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She's going to lie down and try and forget all about last night, aren't you, my dear?"

So saying she propelled me gently across the porch into a long cool hall, paved in black-and-white marble, with flat pilasters and rounded niches with statuary. At the end, beside the rear wall, spread with a great tapestry, an elaborately-carved staircase wound its way up. The butler opened tall double doors on the left and ushered us into a suite of rooms, one opening into the other, with a vista of a great white-and-gold drawing-room at the end—such delightful rooms gay with chintz and flowers, with old portraits everywhere and the loveliest old English furniture you ever saw. The middle room was a long informal sort of lounge-hall, with books and magazines lying about, a piano and a radio, and a line of french windows screened by green sunblinds, open on to the terrace.

There were gay umbrellas on the terrace and long chairs with striped canopies. Below the balustrade, with its masses of pale blue hydrangeas, the gardens—all pergolas covered with climbing roses—sloped down in tiers to a screen of elms, beyond which a marvellous view of the surrounding country was spread, yellow and green fields laid out like a chessboard on a background of hills shimmering bluey in the summer haze. That nice Miss Verge fussed me into one of the long chairs, tucked a rug round my feet and, putting *The Times* and a box of cigarettes within reach, left me.

Somewhere out of sight a fountain splashed quietly; bees hummed among the flowers. I closed my eyes and let the peace of the place soak into my very soul: it was paradise to recline there among all that beauty and think of nothing, after my broken night's rest.

Then I must have fallen asleep.

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Chapter Seven

SHOUTING voices aroused me. Two men working out of sight in the gardens were carrying on a long-distance conversation—something about a “wheel-barrer”—they went on yelling at one another for a long time. I listened to them drowsily, picking out a variety of distant sounds that ran as an under-current—the click-clack of a whetstone laid to a scythe, the whine of a dog shut up somewhere within the house, the faint shriek and clatter of a train. I was conscious of feeling dreadfully tired: it was delicious to lie there and revel in the languor that stole over me.

My watch was broken, but I had no desire to know the time. I fancy I was really too exhausted to sleep properly. I dozed in snatches; but most of the time I was in that half-conscious state that lies between sleeping and waking. I had a vague idea that someone came and looked at me and tip-toed away, and in between my cat-naps I was aware of a telephone ringing inside the house, of the clatter of a Venetian blind being raised—little odd noises like these, followed by long stretches of silence.

One of these quiet periods imperceptibly merged into the sound of people talking. The voices were so close they seemed to be speaking into my very ear: I realized after that the speakers must have stood in the open french window of the lounge, just behind me as I lay in my chair, concealed from view by the canopy shading it. A woman's voice said: “So you didn't go for your ride?” and a deeper voice, a man's, replied: “I waited for you. Why do you always fub me off with excuses?”

I didn't want to eavesdrop; in my state of torpor—I think that's the word I want—I found myself listening without any thought of wrong. I heard the woman say: “I had to see Curtis . . .” Then there followed a little cry. “Oh, Eric, no! No, Eric, you must be sensible. That American girl's outside on the terrace.”

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"She's asleep!"

"All the same, I hate being mauled about."

"I don't see why you got Glenn to ask me down if I'm never to see you alone."

"You know Glenn adores playing golf with you."

"Is that the only reason I was asked?"

"You know it isn't, Eric."

Their voices trailed away. I was wide awake now. At the same moment as it was borne in upon me that the speakers were my hostess, Lady Disford, and her sprightly friend, Eric Clayden, I realized that I was listening in on a highly intimate *tête-à-tête*. I didn't know what on earth to do. My impulse was to spring up and disclose myself, but that would embarrass them terribly, and anyway I felt almost too exhausted to move. My ultimate decision was not very noble. I closed my eyes again, resolving to hear no more if I could help it and to forget what I had heard.

But presently her voice, caressing, disturbing, drifted out to me once more. "You make me feel I should have gone to him weeks ago and begged him not to invite you down again. After all, we owe him everything, Rosemary and I."

The answer came back hotly: "You married him—wasn't that reward enough? And how does he repay you? By having his mistress here!"

"I won't have you say such things. Besides, it isn't true."

"Who says it isn't true?"

"I do."

"How do you know?"

"Because . . ."

"Where does she get her money? How can she afford to dress the way she does? Who pays for that flat of hers in town?"

"How should I know? It's none of my business."

"No, but it's Glenn's."

"Eric, you have *the* most poisonous tongue."

"I keep my eyes open, which is more than you seem to do."

"You know as well as I do, if anyone's in love with Elvira Canning, it's not Glenn, but Ronnie . . ."

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"If you think Ronnie Barber has the cash to finance anyone as expensive as Elvira . . ."

His voice faded away. I caught a meaningless word or two, then I heard him again: "I know I act the goat. But it's only to stop myself from thinking. Some day, you'll drive me too far, though, Marcy. There are times when I think you don't care a damn about me."

"You know that's not true, Eric."

"I can't stick it much longer. I've a good mind to chuck up everything and leave this rotten country for good."

"Oh, Eric, you wouldn't rush off and shoot big game and dress for dinner every night in the jungle, with my photograph in a leather frame on the table?"

"There you go, making fun of me as usual! Can't you ever be serious?"

"Much too often, perhaps. Maybe that's why I can't refrain from making fun of you sometimes . . ."

Their conversation broke off abruptly there, as though they had been interrupted. A door closed, then after a brief interval I heard her speaking at the telephone: "This is Lady Disford. . . . Oh, hullo, Glenn . . . Yes, that's right . . . No, I don't know her from Adam . . . But how absurd you are—it's only for a day or two, until after the inquest . . . My dear Glenn, I haven't the foggiest idea—old Treadgold took pity on her . . . Laura has her in tow . . . Young and quite attractive . . . She knows Ronnie . . . My dear man, how was I to know you had to be consulted?—The house is like a hotel, with your golfing partners always coming and going . . . Does she *what*? . . . Oh, golf.—I shouldn't think so—at any rate, she doesn't suggest one of your beefy woman champions . . ."

I sat up, my cheeks burning. The old saw about listeners was true enough: I realized I had been overhearing my host giving his wife hell for asking me to stay without consulting him. While I ruminated over this problem, I was vaguely aware of some desultory talk at the telephone about the party being home in time for tea and some argument about a parcel that had to be fetched at Maiden Shapley station.

At last peace fell again. I snuggled down in my chair. Well,

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if they didn't want me, I could always push off. But for the moment I could enjoy the quiet, the flowers, the birds, the unseen fountain. The air was pleasantly warm, my chair comfortable—in a minute or two I was asleep again.

When I opened my eyes, they fell upon a man reclining in one of the long chairs opposite me. Pipe in mouth and pencil in hand, he was doing the crossword puzzle in *The Times*, and pulling such horrible grimaces that for the moment I was considerably startled. As far as looks went, he was a regular sketch, with a face like a totem pole, a creased, leathery skin stretched tightly over a big nose, strongly-ridged cheek-bones, and a mesh of iron-grey hair drooping over one eye. He was dressed in a blue shirt open at the throat, and a suit of crumpled grey flannel.

I was quite fascinated by the sight of him making faces and talking to himself as he sprawled there, apparently unconscious of my presence. When he got a word right his eyes, which had a sort of goofy gleam in them, would light up, and he would make the oddest noises in his throat while he got busy with his pencil; when, on the other hand, he was stuck, he would groan and writhe and tug at his knuckles till they snapped.

He appeared to be entirely absorbed until a wasp started to buzz around and while swiping at it with his newspaper, he glanced up and caught me regarding him. "Are you any good at crosswords?" he demanded.

"No," I answered firmly.

"What's"—his eye dropped to his newspaper—"the song they sing charms no seafarers to-day"—six letters?"

"Crooners," I suggested ribaldly.

"Bah, that's eight letters." He dashed his grey lock out of his eyes and grimaced. Then he let out a sort of bellow. "It's 'sirens,'" he declared. "'What song the Sirens sang or what name Achilles assumed, ta-da, di, da . . .'"—you know the quotation?" With an ogre-like air of gloating, he filled in the missing word.

"Is it 'Tristram Shandy'?" I queried.

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He made a terrifying face at me. "You're mixing me up with old Treadgold—don't deny it! My name's Wace, and that quotation is from Sir Thomas Browne." Then he leapt up from his chair, crumpled the newspaper into a ball, flung it on the ground and stamped on it. "May the whole accursed, time-wasting tribe of puzzle-makers be doomed to fry for all eternity in the bottomless pit of Tophet!" he trumpeted, and went on to say in a perfectly tranquil tone: "Disford's been asking for you. He probably expected me to wake you up, but that's fiddlesticks."

I perceived now that the terrace was all in shadow and that the sunlight in the gardens had turned to a mellow golden. In a panic I swung my legs to the ground.

"Whatever time is it?"

"Gone six!"

I stared at him aghast. "Goodness, I must have slept all day. Where's Miss Wreith and—and everybody?"

"Bathing in the lake. Disford's in his study. Don't mind if he roars at you: he's a bully. Remember, you're an American, and keep your chin up!" He rapped this all out in jerks, winking and pulling faces at me.

I told him I would have to wash up a little and tidy my hair. "The trouble is," I said, "I don't know where my room is."

Without speaking, he beckoned with his hand and, striding ahead of me into the house, led the way through the lounge into a corridor with windows overlooking the open quadrangle I had remarked from the drive.

We came to a little hall with a glass door giving on the quadrangle and a staircase winding up. He opened a door and I saw a line of hooks hung with a jumble of coats and hats and golf-bags, with a wash-room leading off.

He was waiting for me, cracking his fingers and muttering to himself, when I came out. We passed through the glass door into the open air.

The quadrangle was an oasis of quiet. Under the solemn regard of tier on tier of tall windows, the blackbirds hopped and whistled on the luscious green turf that extended right up to the house, and was broken only by a tiled walk running all

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round. Tritons and mermaids greenly-bronze, gushed water into a broad basin in the centre and the sun struck iridescent gleams from the water as it fell. Beyond the two ends of the wings enclosing the court, smooth lawn sloped gently to the drive and below, the lake glittered in the evening light like a scimitar laid on the grass.

We went out into the quadrangle and walked round the path to another glass door almost at the tip of the opposite wing. We came into a little white lobby with various doors leading off.

My companion went to the door at the end, thumped with his enormous fist on it and, turning on his heel, left me without a word.

An irascible voice shouted: "Come!"

The moment I opened the door a cocker spaniel and a Sealyham sprang from the settee before the great stone fireplace, and rushed at me, filling the air with ear-splitting barks.

I could see no one but a voice cried irritably above the din: "Is that you, Tris? Where the devil has that young woman got to? Let those dogs out, damn it!"

I had a not very clear impression of a large, light apartment with windows on two sides giving on park and quadrangle respectively, a wall lined with books, a big desk luxuriously appointed, a dictaphone, a filing cabinet. It was definitely a man's room—the leather chairs said as much and so did the aroma of cigars that pervaded it.

The voice appeared to come from an alcove at the end. With some difficulty I bundled the yelping dogs outside, and went in search of it.

There was a divan within the alcove. It was placed across a bow window with doors opening on the lawn. On it, his hands folded behind his head, a cigar in his mouth, a stoutish, red-faced man in shirt and trousers was lying. I had an impression of a square jaw, a heavy toothbrush moustache shot with grey, thinning grey hair, close-cropped. He turned his head at the sound of my approach and, on seeing me, scrambled up.

"Hullo!" he remarked. "I thought it was that old image, Wace. This is Miss Pell, isn't it? Where the hell's my jacket?"

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"I'm Clarissa Pell," I answered. "And please don't bother about your coat. Where I come from, all the men shed them in hot weather."

He grinned his relief. "That's where I picked up the habit, I guess."

"You've been in America?"

"Oh, sure."

"What part?"

"All over, but mostly in the West." He glanced at his hairy wrist strapped by a plain silver watch. "How about a small drink before the dressing bell?" Without waiting for my answer, he crossed to the bookshelves, pulled some gadget and a bar swung into view. "I'll shake up a rum cocktail," he said. "I've some rum here such as you never tasted in America, I'll be bound. I bought a case of it in Jamaica, and if I told you what I paid for it, you wouldn't believe me. Do you smoke? Try the cigarettes in the round tin on the desk—I have them specially made for me in Cairo. You hurt your foot, didn't you? How is it?"

He rattled all this off at me over his shoulder while he mixed the drinks. I told him my ankle was still rather stiff and murmured my little speech of thanks about his and Lady Disford's kindness in putting me up. I am not sure whether he heard me, he was so absorbed with his mixing and shaking—at any rate, he made no answer. Then he brought our drinks over.

"Do you mind if I lie down again?" he said. "I can think better lying down. Try that chair. It was made to my own design—I think you'll find it comfortable."

With that he resumed his former position on the divan, staring at the ceiling, his cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth.

"Just what made you go to the Sedgwicke Arms last night?" he demanded suddenly.

I told him about Ronnie Barber and was going on to explain about my accident, when he cut me off. "Why didn't Ronnie say anything about it to me or my missus?" he questioned frowning.

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"It was only a vague suggestion: I don't suppose he thought for a moment I'd take it up."

"Why did you?"

I laughed to cover my embarrassment. "Well, he said it was a lovely old house, and I thought I might as well see it."

"No other reason?"

"No other reason."

He swivelled his head round in a searching, almost threatening glance. But he didn't rattle me. I might feel shy of Lady Disford with her grand ways and self-composed air, and the ogre-like man—Wace, or whatever his name was—might scare me with his mutterings and twitchings: with Disford, however, I was on familiar ground. Successful men of his type are three for a dime back home, with their brusque manner, their vanity, their rather childish boastings about their possessions—I had worked for lots of them in my time—and he didn't impress me in the least. I added: "From what I've seen of Arkwood, thanks to your kindness and Lady Disford's, I think it's reason enough."

He grunted. "Did this fellow, Danbury, tell you what he wanted in these parts?"

"No."

"And it never occurred to you to ask?"

"No."

"You're not very curious."

I shrugged my shoulders. "It was none of my business."

"And he didn't let on who he knew down here?"

"No."

"But he did convey the impression he was expecting to meet somebody?"

"Yes."

"He didn't say who?"

"No."

He grunted, gritting his teeth on his cigar. Rolling it from one corner of his mouth to the other, he said: "Did he mention anything about having been out in the war in Spain?"

"Not to me. But apparently the police have a theory . . ."

"I know—that he was one of these scallywags who're mixed

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up in the Spanish war and that for some reason or other he was tracked down here and bumped off. It's very likely the true explanation. Did he mention where he'd last come from?"

"He told the landlord he'd walked from . . ."

"I don't give a damn what he told the landlord. What did he tell you?"

"He didn't say anything about it, and I didn't ask him."

The door was pounded. Wace's ugly phiz appeared.

"Could I have a word with you, Glenn?"

"Not now. Can't you see I'm engaged?"

"It's about that commission of mine."

"It can wait, can't it?"

"It's only that I must write to the bank before the post goes out." He tugged at his fingers so that they cracked like castanets. "After all," he went on, his face working, "it was definitely understood . . ."

"Oh, for pity's sake," Disford interrupted, "let the damned bank wait! I'll see you in the morning."

The man at the door made such a funny face that I thought he was about to burst into tears. Then he disappeared.

With a vexed air, our host shifted his position, grunted. "The trouble about the modern world is that there are too many people living on other people's backs. Parasites like this fellow Wace, scrounging their half per cent here, their half per cent there. You wouldn't think to look at him that he has one of the best financial brains in England. Yet he can't market it—if it weren't for me he'd be in the gutter. No stability. It's stability that counts—marking down your objective and going for it like a bull at a gate. If you were in business, you'd know what I mean." Scowling, he drew on his cigar.

"But I am in business, Sir Glenn."

He swung towards me in his abrupt fashion. "What business?"

"That's to say, I earn my own living. I'm a shorthand typist. I've been working in Wall Street for the past five years."

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"Are you competent?"

"Competent enough to have held down a job with a firm like Boyle and Skrimshire's for eighteen months."

"Tris Wace wants a secretary—he's working out a big amalgamation I'm putting through. Are you discreet?"

"I was Mr. Skrimshire's confidential secretary."

"Old Tris takes some getting used to—he's scared off two girls already. Well, if Laura Verge—she's my secretary—okays you, you're hired. We can put you up. Talk wages with Laura."

"But, Sir Glenn . . ."

"Don't waste my time. The matter's settled." He shot a rapid glance at my glass. "Pour yourself another drink."

"No more, thanks."

"Then give me one." He extended his glass and I filled it from the shaker. "Isn't this rum a dream?"

"It's very smooth."

"You betcha!" He drank, and smacked his lips.

"You've lived out on the Pacific coast, haven't you?" said I, smiling.

He looked at me in surprise. "That's right. But how do you know?"

"I worked for a man from Seattle once. 'You betcha!' was a great expression of his. He told me everyone uses it out there."

He chuckled. "You're a bright girl. I farmed fruit in Oregon once, but it's a good while back." The door was hammered. "Come!" he barked.

It was the Wreith girl in a very fetching *batik* beach wrap and sandals. "Here she is, Ronnie!" she called over her shoulder. She went straight to the cocktail shaker, and sniffed it. "Rum!" she announced. "Glenn's been giving her one of his tonsil-ticklers."

Muffled in white towelling, his dark curls wet and shiny, my friend from the *Queen Mary* looked very healthy and hearty.

"Well," he said, giving me a clammy hand, "this is a surprise."

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I smiled at him. "I took you at your word, you see!"

"And how!" he answered—it seemed to me that his tone was not particularly cordial.

Rosemary put a glass in his hand. "We're in luck," she remarked. "It's Glenn's special rum."

"She can type," said Disford to the room at large. "She's going to help Tris."

"What fun!" commented Rosemary in her unemotional way. "You'll be staying on for a bit, then?"

"If Mr. Wace can put up with me," I said.

"If she can stand the old devil, she means," our host said, grinning.

Barber was silent, but as he drank, his eyes were fixed thoughtfully on my face over the rim of his glass.

"Where's Elvira?" Disford wanted to know.

At the same moment the notes of a gong boomed into the room.

"She went up to change," the Wreith girl replied. "You're in the Green Room, in the south wing. I'd better show you where it is. I told Marcy's maid to put out some frocks for you—your trunk won't be here till the morning."

She strode out ahead of me.

Chapter Eight

"WELL, Miss," said Cox—not very enthusiastically, "I believe that's the best we can do."

Cox was Lady Disford's maid, a freshly pretty young country girl, whom my hostess had sent to help me get into my borrowed frock. I was a good inch taller than either of the two sisters and the fact was immediately apparent as I measured against myself one after the other of the armful of evening gowns Cox had brought to the Green Room. Even the gleaming black satin upon which I eventually decided, though it seemed to me far too elaborate for the occasion, was by no means what you might call a fit, and Cox, with all her

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pinning, was not able to make much of a job of it. Nevertheless, I did not look too bad, I decided, studying myself in the tall cheval glass, after Cox had left me to go and attend to her mistress. My skin has always been pretty white and, for anyone with my colouring—my hair is reddish-brown—the eau-de-nil walls of the Green Room were an ideal background. Inspecting my hair, I was glad I had treated myself to a wave-and-set at that horribly expensive Mayfair place before leaving London.

I felt rested after my lazy day and refreshed by a glorious soak in the bath Cox drew for me in the bathroom—as big as a barn—leading out of my room, my skin fragrant with bath-salts from a row of great glass jars straight from Bond Street. I was conscious of a sense of rare exhilaration. Despite Elmer and my tumble, I had come to Arkwood and come, as it now seemed, to stay.

I gazed about me with delight, reluctant to leave that exquisite room even to go down to dinner. My heart warmed to the pale-jade wainscot, to the courtly Chippendale—the four-poster with its slender fluted columns, the amusing little kidney desk, the graceful lyre-back chairs. And I loved my lady.

She hung over the marble mantelpiece facing the head of the bed; such a serene, beautiful lady with her smooth brow fringed with tiny curls of the palest gold and sloping, shining shoulders emerging from a powder-blue gown—she contemplated me, so calm, so undismayed, she was a joy to see. “Althea, Countess of Sedgwick” was written below and Peter Lely was the painter, so I concluded she was a belle of Charles the Second’s Court. There were other portraits—two groups of children with lovely fawn-like eyes by someone called Zoffany, and a Romney of a bottle-nosed old man in a blue coat, described as “Admiral of the Red,” whatever that might mean—and an old painting of a racehorse held by a very whiskery groom; some samplers, too. But my glance always went back to my peerless Althea.

The beautiful things surrounding me reminded me of the centuries of taste and refinement that had contributed to the

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history of the house. The idea that I might be going to live in and breathe this old-world atmosphere for an indefinite period made my heart flutter and almost reconciled me to the prospect of following in the footsteps of the two unfortunate young women scared away by the eccentric Mr. Wace. True, the ordeal of meeting all these strangers somewhat abashed me. I could not help being aware of a certain tension in the house. There was our host, to begin with, a pretty crude type or I missed my guess, and this woman called Elvira Canning, who appeared to be the girl-friend, and in whom Ronnie Barber was seemingly interested. Then there was the neglected wife, playing around with the young man, Eric Clayden; and lastly the Wreith girl, defiant and miserable. I did not want to be dragged into all this intrigue: in fact, I made up my mind to steer clear of it. True, Ronnie Barber seemed to have thought better of his invitation and would not be much use to me. But there was Miss Verge. As far as I could see, she was the one thoroughly level-headed and dependable member of the house-party. I made up my mind that Miss Verge should be my sheet-anchor.

Someone tapped at my door. A voice said: "May one come in?" I went and opened. A very attractive-looking blonde in white lace, exceedingly well groomed, stood there. "Cox told Edith—that's the maid who looks after me—that you were having trouble about your frock," she said, giving me a dazzling smile. "So I thought I'd pop in on you and see whether I could help. I'm Elvira Canning and you're Clarissa Pell, aren't you?"

"That's right," I said. "Do come in!"

So this is the notorious Mrs. Canning, was my thought as I contemplated her. She was tall, slender and high-breasted, and superlatively well turned out. Without being exactly beautiful, she had glamour and a vitality that was sheerly bewitching—it seemed to radiate from her, a gleaming thing like the pale gold of her hair which she wore in a plain knot on her neck or the ivory lustre of her complexion. The fact that she was in white suggested to me that she might be older than she looked, for, nowadays, as everybody knows, women look

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thirty for years. Besides, she had a steely glitter in her eye and an air of self-possession which spoke of considerable experience of the world. Without being in the least matronly, she looked mature—I gave her about forty.

"We're fellow Americans, you know," she said, her glance taking me in. "My, what pretty colouring you have, my dear, and your skin's lovely." She sighed. "What beautiful girls America turns out! But," she went on smiling, "where *did* you get that horror? My gracious, it makes you look like a *vendeuse* from the rue de la Paix." She held up a warning finger. "Now stay there and don't budge! It's ten minutes to the second gong so we've plenty of time. I have the very frock for you. How are those slippers you're wearing?"

"Tight! They're a pair of Lady Disford's."

"Show me your foot!"

I stuck out my foot and she laid hers, slim and beautifully shod, beside it. Her slippers were characteristically exotic. They looked like scarlet lacquer—I recognized the Delman touch. "A pair of mine should fit you better. I'll be right back!"

She darted out. I felt quite touched. Of course, I couldn't come within a mile of her either for looks or chic; but so many women are poor sports where other women are concerned that her spontaneous kindness almost gave me a lump in my throat. Within two minutes she was back, quite breathless and excited. She had a vivid green frock over her arm and carried in her hand a pair of gold sandals. "Now off with that monstrosity—it makes you look fifty, at least," she cried gaily, "and let's see what your fairy godmother can do!" With that she tossed to me the dress she carried.

I could not repress a little gasp as I held it up. It was a simple green Roman crêpe, with a plain gold sash, as simple as simple but with the rue de la Paix in every line. "But it's a dream!" I cried. Laughing gaily she was already pulling out Cox's pins. "On with it," she exclaimed, "or we'll be late for dinner and catch hell from Glenn!"

I pulled the dress over my head, Elvira assisting. "But it fits you like a glove!" she declared, stepping back. "Well, if

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that wasn't a happy thought of mine! In that gown, sister, you'll knock their eyes out!"

I gazed at myself in the glass. As she said, the frock fitted perfectly. "It's lovely!" I said. "And I'll tell you something else. It's brand new—I don't believe you've ever worn it."

She laughed. "Well, I haven't, to be quite frank, but then I seem to have so many clothes. How are the slippers?"

"They could have been made for me!" I stretched out a gleaming gold foot.

"You've a nice, slim foot. Now let's have a look at you! Yes, you'll do, I guess. Now I must run and finish prinking. I'll see you downstairs."

I took her to the door. "I think it's terribly kind of you. Thanks a thousand times!"

She pressed my arm. "That's all right, honey, and by the way, don't trouble to return the frock."

"But, Mrs. Canning!"

"I'd like you to have it. You look much nicer in it than I ever should: besides, the time to enjoy pretty things is when you're young." She fluttered her hand at me and hurried out.

I was quite overcome. What a good sort she was! It was the first frock straight from Paris I'd ever owned: I had a thrill as I studied myself in the long pier glass. I couldn't help feeling glad that Ronald Barber was going to see me looking my best.

A voice spoke from the door. "Well, how are you getting on?" It was the Wreith girl in a green-and-black flowered gown. "My word," she exclaimed, "don't you look stunning?"

"I couldn't get into any of the frocks you sent over," I said, "so Mrs. Canning came to the rescue. And what do you think? She made me a present of this dream of a frock!"

The Wreith girl made no answer: I felt that her silence was disapproving. She helped herself to some lavender water from my bottle on the dressing-table. "So you're going to work for Tris?"

"If Mr. Wace will have me."

She gave her hard laugh. "He'll do what Glenn tells him. He's a bit of a gargoyle to look at, but he's all right. His trouble is . . ." She jerked her elbow up. She smoothed out

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her hair in the glass—she wore it combed straight back. "He works for Glenn, but he detests him, and it comes out when he has one of his drinking spells. But don't let that worry you. When he has one of his bouts on, he shuts himself up in that cottage of his and nobody sees him for days."

"He doesn't live in the house, then?"

"No. He has what used to be a gamekeeper's cottage in the park, near the Burstowe gate. You'll be working there. How did you get on with my respected brother-in-law?"

"All right. He's direct, anyway, and that always simplifies things."

I was watching her face in the mirror and saw how her eyes clouded over. "Glenn's direct all right."

"He told me the only way to get on in life is to mark down your objective and go for it."

She laughed on a hard note. "That's Glenn. That's Glenn, every time. That's how he married my sister. He met her and forgot everything else because he wanted her. So he married her and now the Wreith family's on velvet."

I was embarrassed because I felt that she had raised the mask for an instant. I said, because I could not think of anything else to say: "I think your sister's lovely."

It was as though a light had been turned on in a dark room. Her whole face became radiant. "Yes, isn't she? I was so glad for her sake that Glenn married her—she fits so beautifully into this setting, doesn't she? Marcy and I have always been tremendous pals—if she had her way, I'd make my home here altogether. But I've always worked for my living and I like my independence." She glanced at me between her eyelashes. "Do you think she's happy?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "How can I tell?"

"Do you think she looks happy?"

"Not particularly." I stopped short.

"You mean—Eric?"

I was silent. "He was in love with her before she met Glenn," she went on. "Glenn's a bit of a handful, you know—you can't blame her for liking to have Eric around as a sort of lightning conductor, if Eric's willing to put up with it."

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I laughed. "What about Glenn?"

She pressed her lips together in a firm line. "Glenn should be the last one to complain, it seems to me."

The booming of the second gong came welling up from below and we went down to dinner.

Elvira Canning's "prinking," as she called it, had consisted, I noticed, of putting on an emerald string, with ear-rings and clips to match—the uncharitable thought occurred to me that they must have set somebody back a packet. Was it our host? She stood at the fireplace smoking a cigarette: her eyes flicked me a friendly glance as I came in with the Wreith girl, for which I was grateful. She might not rival Marcia Disford's for looks; but her style was flawless and I felt that she could probably give us all lessons when it came to managing men.

Our host was there in a velvet smoking jacket, rugged and rather dour, reading the evening paper, and Clayden and Barber: Wace, too, with a ragged old woolly incongruously visible under his dinner jacket. Barber, who was saying something to Mrs. Canning that made her laugh, broke off to eye me with his usual cool and detached air—I think my frock impressed him. I had forgotten that Mr. Treadgold was coming to dinner until he bobbed up beside me, very distinguished-looking in his evening clothes, with a glass of sherry.

"Well, how are they treating you?" he inquired.

I spread my skirts. "Mrs. Canning's frock——" I poked out a golden slipper at him. "And her shoes."

"You do me proud as your sponsor, my dear."

"Have they found anything out about Danbury?"

He shook his head. "Scotland Yard gives him a clean bill; at least—he has no criminal record. That reminds me—you said you thought you might recognize the name of the ship involved in this shipwreck of his if you saw it."

"I might, I suppose. Why?"

"There's a book about famous shipwrecks in the library here. I thought we might run through it together, after dinner."

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"All right."

Marcia Disford came in, prettily breathless. "I'm terribly sorry . . ."

Disford was looking at his watch and frowning.

"It was my fault," I spoke up. "She lent me her maid."

Our hostess threw me a grateful glance. "You look wonderful. Let's go in."

She drew her arm into mine and we went in to dinner together. I sat on the host's right with Barber on the other side with Mrs. Canning and Eric Clayden beyond him: I noticed that Clayden was on Marcia Disford's left at the other end of the table. The dining-room was all in white with the lights in sconces made of glass ostrich feathers, and cellophane curtains. It was modern, yet somehow perfectly in accord with the period of the house. Rococo, Rosemary told me it was, across the table, and said her sister had designed it. There was a portrait of Lady Disford, rather formal, at one end and one of our host, in shooting tweeds with a gun, at the other.

The dinner was very elaborate and we drank champagne poured from a jug. I felt rather out of it as Sir Glenn, after one or two perfunctory remarks, ignored me and talked business with Miss Verge on his left.

As for the Barber creature, he never addressed me at all, but devoted himself to the dazzling Mrs. Canning on his other side. He seemed to be laying himself out to amuse her: she was gay and radiant throughout the meal. I glanced at Disford from time to time to see how he was taking it. But—rather to my surprise—I found that he ignored them: whenever he turned away from Laura Verge, his eyes sought his wife and, as often as he caught her, as he mostly did, in animated conversation with the Clayden man on her left, he frowned.

It was still daylight outside when we left the men to their port and cigars. We had coffee on the terrace and at once the Wreith sisters fell upon me with questions about the murder. I had to tell them all about the little man, his experience as amateur hangman, his adventure in the wreck with the poor woman he "coshed." They were very disappointed I could

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not recall the name of the ship, and they cross-examined me so intensely that at last Mrs. Canning came to my rescue.

"I do think you should remember that Miss Pell has had a terrible shock," she said. "I'm sure she doesn't want to be continually reminded of it. As for the wreck this little tramp claims to have been in, I dare say he invented the whole thing, as well as the other blood-and-thunder stories he told her."

"He showed me a clipping about the shipwreck," I pointed out.

"What you have to do is to forget all about it," she said. "You're much too young and pretty to bump into such horrors. Tell me about New York—have you seen any good plays?"

Laura Verge had held herself aloof from all this back-chat, smoking a cigarette and reading *Punch*. But when the butler appeared to clear the coffee away, she seized the opportunity to draw me over to the terrace balustrade, out of ear-shot of the circle. There she told me that Disford—"G.D.," as she called him—had asked her to have a little chat with me about this idea of my helping out old Wace.

I found myself liking Miss Verge a lot. She was brisk and businesslike in the way she cross-examined me about my experience, and described the sort of work, mostly statistical and financial, I would have to do; but she was fundamentally kindly and genuine—a real person. I was able to assure her quite truthfully that I had done plenty of similar work in the past—market investigation reports and the like—and she said with a quiet little nod:

"Quite. Nevertheless, I'm going to suggest that you give it a trial for a week. It's not that I doubt your competence, my dear, but Tris Wace is a cranky, obstreperous old devil that wants tactful handling and—oh, well, we shall see. 'G.D.' suggests four pounds a week and all found, which means that you'll go on living here as his guest, taking your meals as Wace does, with the family. If you can stick old Tris, it's a six weeks' to two months' job—I don't know whether you can stop in England that long."

"I think I could stop here to the end of my life."

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Then the men came drifting out. Miss Verge beckoned Wace over.

"This is your new secretary, Tris," she said.

He nodded, grimacing. "Glenn told me."

"When do you want her to start?"

"I can start in the morning if you like, Mr. Wace," I put in.

"You'd better fetch her, say, at ten, and show her the way to the cottage, Tris," said Miss Verge.

He nodded vaguely. "All right. She's no good at cross-words, you know." A spasm twisted his face. "You'd best watch Glenn, Laura," he went on in an undertone. "He's looking for trouble to-night."

I caught the troubled expression on Miss Verge's face. They walked away together.

There was talk of bridge. Eric Clayden asked me if I played but I hastily said I didn't: I didn't feel that my game was up to Arkwood standards. There were lights in the lounge now and they all trailed in there, leaving me on the terrace to finish my cigarette and watch the last fiery sunset trail pale in the sky.

Then without warning Barber stood before me.

"Stroll with me as far as the Prince Consort's Walk," he said. "I want to talk to you."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that, after the way he had ignored me at dinner he could stroll by himself—and stroll straight to Hades, as far as I was concerned. But then I reflected that it was pretty *triste*, sitting there on the terrace all by myself. The upshot was that I let him shepherd me towards the steps leading down through the gardens.

Chapter Nine

UNDER the pergolas the dusk was velvety and the tea-roses scented the air. A white gate in the hedge at the foot of the terrace brought us directly into a solemn grove. They

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were fine old elms and their topmost branches met overhead to shade the vista of green turf stretching away between the curiously clipped box-hedges I had remarked from the drive on arriving. A small round building shimmered whitely at the end.

"The Prince Consort's Walk," Barber announced.

"Why 'Prince Consort's Walk'?"

"He and Queen Victoria stopped at Arkwood once, soon after their marriage. The Prince liked to saunter here in the evenings. Lady Disford has the room they occupied—we must get her to show it to you."

I laughed. "What fun, to sleep in Queen Victoria's bed! You've no idea how this place thrills me! It makes all the English history I've ever read seem so real."

It was creepy under the trees. Bats swooped against the marbled sky the sunset had left behind, and the dew made everything smell delicious. Under our feet the turf was as lush and soft as those carpets they have at the picture-palaces.

"I'm so thrilled you wouldn't believe it, to get this work with Mr. Wace," I said. "I think I'm going to be very happy here, although it seems to me I shall have two pretty difficult people to deal with."

"Who's the other?"

"Sir Glenn, of course."

"What's he been doing to you?"

"Nothing—he was very nice to me. But he's tough and he has a hard eye—I shouldn't care to have a run-in with him."

He moved his shoulders imperceptibly. "He's self-made—he's had his way to fight in life. Yet he has a curiously soft side to him." He pointed with his hand at a gap in the hedge. "Do you see those little white stones? That's Glenn's dog-cemetery—he always has a lot of dogs. Come and have a look at it."

Within a low fence, just inside the shrubbery, five or six miniature white tombstones were set up. My companion struck a match and showed me various names—"Don," "Fifi," "Max," "Duck"—followed by a date.

"Duck," said he, "was an old retriever of Glenn's that

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managed to get run over, down there outside the lodge gates, the first week-end I was invited here, and had to be put out of its pain. Glenn was devoted to Duck and refused to let the vet do it—he insisted on despatching poor old Duck himself. He made me go with him—to give him courage, he said—and, believe it or not, as he pushed the cyanide down the poor brute's throat, he was blubbing like a kid. You know," he added, "a fellow who can shed tears over his dead dog isn't as tough as he may appear."

"I agree. I shall remember your story."

We resumed our stroll in silence. Then my companion said suddenly: "Listen, you've got to get out of here."

I gazed at him in astonishment. "What did you say?"

"You've got to get out of here!"

"Leave Arkwood, do you mean?"

He nodded. "The sooner the better."

I stared at him. "Why ever should I?"

He said: "You're a nice person, Clarissa. I liked you the moment I set eyes on you, that night in the forward bar of the *Queen Mary*—in fact, I was just wondering how I could manage to speak to you without seeming too crude about it, when you knocked that glass over. You're sweet and unspoiled and—and I don't want you to run into anything worse than you've run into already. So take my advice and get out!"

"What on earth do you mean? What's going to happen?"

He shrugged his shoulders sullenly—he could look pretty sullen, with his black straight eyebrows and his dark eyes.

"I've said all I intend to say. If you care to disregard a friendly hint, that's your affair."

"But I've taken a job here."

"Is it so important to work for old Wace?"

"Of course it's important, whether it's him or anyone else. I'm a working woman and I have my living to get. Four pounds a week and all found isn't to be sneezed at these days. Besides, look at the kick I shall get out of being a guest, in a heavenly house like this! Anyhow, nothing's going to happen to *me*. I can look after myself."

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He gave another dour shrug. "These people aren't your sort. You're better away from it all."

I laughed. "Now I see what's on your mind. You think the atmosphere of Arkwood harmful to my pure young mind."

"I didn't say that."

"No. But it's what you think. Listen. I've eyes in my head the same as you. You don't suppose I can't see that the Clayden boy's all burnt up over Lady Disford and that Sir Glenn doesn't like it one little bit? Though how he can make a fuss about anything like that with that dashing Mrs. Canning around . . ."

For the first time he laughed. "I take my hat off to you women. There's mighty little you miss. Let's sit down a moment, shall we? Or will you be cold?"

We had reached the small building at the end of the walk. It was a little round temple, open at the sides, with a rustic table and some chairs. "I'm all right," I told him, and he found me a chair and a cushion for my back. Then he gave me a cigarette. We smoked for a little while in silence. Some rabbits stole out and frisked about on the edge of the walk.

"What other observations have you made?" my companion asked me at length.

"What's the matter with Rosemary Wreith?" I demanded.

He contemplated the burning end of his cigarette. "Poor Rosemary!" he said.

"What makes her look so tragic?"

He moved his shoulders. "They say Disford married the wrong sister."

"How do you mean?"

"Rosemary met him first—it was when she was working in New York—and gave him an introduction to Marcia in London."

"And Marcia grabbed him away from her, is that it?"

He smiled. "That's about the size of it, I gather. Rosemary worships her sister, you know—she's her absolute doormat. There are only just the two of them and Rose-

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mary's the elder. When Colonel Wreith died—he was killed in the last year of the war—their mother was left pretty badly off. But it was Rosemary who went out to work when she was old enough—Marcia stayed home with mother."

"Like Martha and Mary, eh?"

He laughed. "That's a charitable way of putting it. Rosemary slaved like a black to keep those two in comfort. Even after Mrs. Wreith died she insisted on supporting Marcia—she had a good job in America then."

"You're an old friend of theirs, I expect?"

"Me? No, I only started coming down here earlier in the summer. I've a fairly low golf-handicap—that's the sole reason I'm asked. All I know about them I get out of Laura Verge, and I'm not sure that she's a particularly reliable witness."

"Why not?"

"Oh, well, it's one of those situations where a fellow in middle life takes a young wife. Laura's been with Glenn for years, doing everything for him, and, good sport though she is, it can't be much fun for her, playing second-fiddle to her ladyship. That's human nature, isn't it?"

"I guess so. I think Lady Disford's charming. I'm not in the least surprised at any man falling for her."

"Nor I. As I say, we don't have to take everything Laura says *au pied de la lettre*."

"The one I'm sorry for is Rosemary. She looks unhappy. Was she fond of Disford?"

He sighed. "She's bitter, isn't she? I guess she must have cared for him and, if you ask me, with all loyalty to her sister, still does." He shook his head. "They're all living under a terrific head of steam in this house and from one moment to another something's going to blow up. In your place, I'd hop on my bike and go on with my tour."

I extended my bandaged foot. "And my ankle?"

"Take a train!"

I leaned back in my chair. "You're sorry you asked me here, aren't you?"

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"I couldn't foresee this business, of course, but, frankly, I am rather."

"Why?"

"I've told you—I don't want you to be mixed up in this situation."

"What situation?"

"We don't have to go all over it again, do we?"

"Are you sure that Mrs. Canning has nothing to do with your wish to get rid of me?"

He was just lifting his cigarette to his lips, but stopped half way, frowning at me.

"What do you know about Elvira Canning?"

"Only what I've seen."

"What do you make of her?"

"I think she's tremendously attractive, and quite the most interesting person here. I didn't realize she was an American. She seems to be a thoroughly good sort. This frock I'm wearing is one of hers. It's brand new and she insisted on making me a present of it."

He appeared to be listening with only half an ear. He broke in now: "This is the first real chance I've had of talking to you. I wish you'd tell me just what happened at the Sedgwick Arms last night."

However chatty he might be about the other members of the house-party, I saw that he was saying nothing about the fascinating Mrs. Canning—it was very evident he wanted to change the conversation. But I wasn't having any—I could not forget his neglect of me at dinner.

"Oh dear," I said, "do we really have to bring that up again? I seem to have talked of nothing else ever since I arrived here. I'd much rather hear some more about Mrs. Canning. Where did you meet her?"

"At Monte Carlo, last winter." His air was sulky.

I laughed. "You don't have to be ashamed of falling for anybody like her. I think she's stunning. And our host thinks so, too, doesn't he?"

He glowered at me. "Who's been gossiping to you?"

"Nobody. I was just wondering."

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"Wondering what?"

"About Mrs. Canning. She's most expensively dressed and her jewellery's wonderful. Is she very well off?"

"I don't know anything about it."

I laughed. "Listen, I'm not conceited enough to imagine that your Mrs. Canning could ever regard me as a rival. Therefore this mad urge of yours to get rid of me at all costs must be due to some idea on your part that the atmosphere of this house is bad for my morals. Well, you can forget it. When you've knocked around New York offices for as long as I have, you realize that there's a type of woman who always has a bunch of men eager to eat out of her hand. Frankly, I don't give a rap whether Mrs. Canning pays for her own clothes or who takes care of her: all I know is that I've been hired to do a job here and that I'm going to do it." With that I dropped my cigarette on the ground and put my foot on it. "And now I really think we'd better be getting back to the house, or I shall be losing my reputation."

He stood up then. "I wish you'd tell me one thing," he said. "Do you think you'd recognize again this mysterious person that fetched this poor devil Danbury out of his room at the Sedgwick Arms?"

His determination to bring the conversation round to the murder irritated me and I replied pretty shortly: "How can one recognize a shadow?"

"You wouldn't know whether it was a man or a woman?"

"I would not. As I told the police."

"About this wreck he told you he was in . . ."

His persistence got on my nerves.

"Do you mind? I don't want to talk about it. Shall we go in now?"

We spoke no more then, but returned by the way we had come. At the gate in the hedge he stopped and faced me. "Then you won't take my advice?" he said.

"I shouldn't dream of it. You don't understand—this is one of the most wonderful things that has ever happened to me, to be invited to stay in this historic house."

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"I hope you won't regret your decision."

"You bet I won't. You don't realize how novel it is to me to see English people in their home—and such a home."

He broke in quite fiercely: "This isn't their home. These people don't belong here. Oh, they're kind enough and hospitable enough, I know, but they're interlopers."

I laughed. "You mean, they're not earls, or something. I call that rank snobbery. After all, I'm an interloper myself—and not for the first time, if you remember that night in the *Queen Mary* when I gate-crashed into the first class."

"Gate-crashers—you've said it! That's what we all are, here at Arkwood—third-class that's gate-crashed into the first." He took my arm. "Well, I'd have saved you from it if I could. Come, let's go in." His air was so sombre that I could not help feeling impressed. In silence we mounted the steps through the gardens. The open french windows of the lounge spilled long bars of light upon the dark and forsaken terrace.

An angry voice drifted out to us. It was Disford, and he, was shouting with rage. In the light from the house I saw my companion's eyes snap.

"By the Lord Harry," I heard him murmur, "something's blown up at last!"

Chapter Ten

WE walked straight in upon a first class family row. Our host, bristling like a fighting-cock, his round, plump face congested with wrath, was facing us as we appeared, his short legs straddled on the hearth-rug. An empty chair at one of the two tables of bridge in the foreground showed where he had been partnering Wace against Mrs. Canning and Eric Clayden. At the other table Marcia Disford, who was playing with Miss Verge against Rosemary and Mr. Treadgold, had risen, pale and tense, to her feet. I had a

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glimpse of Rosemary, staring, not at her brother-in-law, but at Mrs. Canning; I was shocked by the burning hostility in her eyes.

Everyone looked miserable and embarrassed, except Mrs. Canning. Her attitude made it fairly clear that she was the cause of the trouble. She was ice cool, polishing the nails of one hand on the palm of the other with a carelessly indifferent air that, like the half smile playing round her lips, had something deliberately provocative about it.

As we came in I heard Clayden say as he gathered up the cards: "Oh, for pity's sake, Glenn, Marcy was only joking."

"Not a very good joke," Mrs. Canning commented in a voice like the tinkle of an icicle.

"Shut up, Eric!" Disford ordered. His glance ranged round the hushed room. "I'll have no guest driven out of my house, and that's flat. If I say she stays, she stays; do you understand me, all of you?"

Mrs. Canning had opened her gold vanity-case and was shaking the powder out of her puff. "My dear Glenn," she remarked, dabbing at her face in the mirror, "why make such a fuss? I'm really not so hard up for friends that I can't find another house to stop at in July if I want to. Besides, I've business in London." She lifted her eyes to him and added: "I have to see my solicitor."

"Nonsense, Elvira," said our host. "There's no question of your leaving." He turned to his wife. "Marcy, will you please tell Elvira that she's welcome to stay on here for as long as she likes, that it's your wish she should remain?"

At that Clayden dashed the cards down on the table. He had gone very white. "She can't do that," he cried. "You haven't the right to expect . . ."

"Eric," said Lady Disford. "Eric, please!"

"But he can't . . ."

"Be quiet!" She swung to her husband. "It was only a joke, Glenn, not a very successful one, I'm afraid. If I hurt Elvira's feelings, I apologize. Of course I want her to stay on if she's not bored with us."

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"Oh, Marcy, you mutt," her sister broke in. "If Elvira really wants to go, why not let her? After all, nobody wants her here but Glenn."

That got under poor Elvira's skin. She bundled her things together—her powder-box, her cigarette-case, her bright-green chiffon handkerchief—and stood up. "Really, Glenn," she observed, flushed with anger, "I don't think you need have let me in for that."

"Wait!" said Disford, and his tone rang like hammer on anvil. He glowered at the Wreith girl who, with a defiant air, was playing with her beads. "You'll apologize for that remark, Rosemary!"

"I'll be damned if I do!" said Rosemary.

"Rosemary!" cried Marcia, and ran to her side.

"I don't see why he should be allowed . . ." her sister began, doggedly, but the other stopped her mouth with her hand. "Rosemary," she entreated, "don't say any more! Please, Rosemary! Rosemary darling, do this for me! Tell Elvira you didn't mean it."

There was a long pause. For myself, I found the tension almost unbearable. Not knowing where to look, I fastened my eyes on the green handkerchief that trailed from Mrs. Canning's fingers. It was inscribed with various texts and, concentrating in my embarrassment on trying to read these, I saw that they were drinking toasts in different languages. I made out "Here's how!" and "Prosit!" and "Santé!" I found the idea rather amusing.

Suddenly the Wreith girl jumped to her feet, pushing her sister out of the way. "Oh, hell!" she exclaimed. "The remark is withdrawn." She strode across to where Mrs. Canning sat and laid a hand lightly on her shoulder. "Sorry, Elvira, but I lost my temper." She did not wait for a reply, but sailed out on to the terrace—there were tears in her eyes as she passed us.

With deliberate calm Mrs. Canning used her lipstick. We watched her finish the operation and put the lipstick away.

"Do we play another rubber?" she inquired, looking about her languidly.

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Clayden pushed his chair back. "Not for me, thanks." He rose up and went out into the air.

My eye sought out our host. He was blowing his nose with an air of relief. "What are we all standing about for?" he demanded with forced joviality. "Let's have some champagne. Just touch that bell behind you, would you mind, Treadgold? Oh, there you are, Ronnie! How about taking that young puppy's place?"

"I don't mind if I do," said Barber in his casual way.

"Then you shall play with me," Mrs. Canning declared, turning her most dazzling smile on him.

"If he can tear himself away from Miss Pell," Miss Verge put in from the adjoining table, where she had laid herself a hand of Canfield, and added to me: "Don't believe a word he tells you, Clarissa. He's a dangerous man."

"What's a fellow to do?" my companion protested. "You spurn my dishonourable advances, Vergie, so I'm forced to turn to the next best-looking girl in the party." He winked at me.

The tension was broken: the storm was over.

The butler brought two bottles of champagne in a cooler, and a tray of glass goblets, and I then noticed that our hostess was missing—I guessed she had gone in search of her sister. Disford, now in his most genial mood, insisted on opening the wine himself.

"You pour it," he bade me, thrusting a bottle into my hands. I was not very skilful about it and managed to spill some of the wine on the tray. "Oi," he cried out in alarm, and took the bottle from me. "Did you never hear 'A bottle by the neck, a woman by the waist'?" He chuckled and winked at me.

"That's funny," I said. "That poor devil of a steward at the inn last night used the very same expression to me when we were having supper together."

He glanced up quickly from his pouring and the wine creamed over in the glass he was filling.

"Look out!" I cried, and he checked the bottle in the nick of time.

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"It's a sailor's saying," he remarked, passing with his bottle to the next glass. "Sailors are a rum lot—they have the drollest way of expressing themselves."

With that he carried off his tray of glasses to the card-table, where Mrs. Canning, Barber and old Wace were waiting to start their bridge. Then I perceived Mr. Treadgold beckoning to me from a sofa standing in one of the windows.

"Sit down a minute and talk to me," he said, patting the place at his side. As I obeyed, he went on, speaking with lowered voice behind his hand: "Once they settle down we'll slip off to the library and take a look at that book I told you about."

"What book?"

"The one about famous shipwrecks—you know."

"Of course. I'd forgotten."

"If you could recall the name of this wreck the poor devil was in, it'd be a long step forward."

I took a sip of my wine. "You're all worked up about this murder, aren't you?"

His pink cheeks went a shade pinker. "It's a debased taste, I know, but I find the study of crime absorbing."

I laughed. "You English are a great people for hobbies, I've always heard. But somehow I can't see criminology and tailoring going together very well."

"On the contrary, in the very nature of things a tailor should make an excellent criminologist. After all, the only difference between them is that a tailor works on the uncut cloth from a pattern while the crime investigator works from the finished article; that's to say, from such clues as he may pick up backward to the pattern. In other words, the tailor sews, but the sleuth has to unravel. Remember, a man has no secrets from his tailor. In the fitting-room we see human nature literally in the raw. Any knowledge I've gained concerning the unpredictable workings of the human mind I've acquired measuring customers. And I've been at it for more than forty years."

"But do you mean to say you still measure customers yourself?"

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"Not all, of course, but our older clients, certainly."

"Well!" I couldn't help saying.

He glanced at me a little sternly. "I'm the fifth generation of a tailoring family that's been making clothes in the City of London ever since the reign of George the Third, and in your own home-town of New York since the Civil War—Bowl, Treadgold and Flack, of East Forty-Sixth Street. If you find me consorting with the nobs like this, it's only in the line of business, let me tell you. I haven't succeeded in landing our host as a customer yet, but I shall. Will you take a look at the hang of that smoking-jacket he wears? It's a disgrace: he bought it off the hook somewhere, I shouldn't wonder. I'm not in the least ashamed of being a tailor: indeed, I glory in being a tailor and, what's more, one of the three or four really first-class tailors surviving in the West End of London." He twinkled his blue eyes at me. "The circumstance that I don't drop my aitches and can afford to travel with a man-servant, my little Clarissa, don't alter the fact that I'm a West End tradesman and proud of it." With that he stuck his cigar in his mouth with a challenging air.

I said: "But crime investigation's your hobby?"

He wagged his head. "Well, it's become a little more than that. I've always been interested in crime, and over a long period of years my study of criminology has brought me at various times in contact with Scotland Yard. I'm not infrequently called in as a tailoring expert—you know, there are many cases in which a shred of cloth or a simple button, or sometimes an entire suit, has an important bearing in the detection of crime.* As it says in *Tristram Shandy*, I happen 'at certain intervals and changes of the moon, to be both fiddler and painter, according as the fly stings,'—an allusion, you know, to the famous French painter, Ingres, who thought no end of himself as a violinist, much in the same way, I dare say"—he smiled his genial smile at me—"as I fancy myself as a sleuth."

*See *Mr. Treadgold Cuts In*, by Valentine Williams, Hodder & Stoughton, 1937.

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I laughed. "So you sit around summing us all up? It's a grim feeling."

"I'm afraid I'm inclined to. It's just a bad habit of mine."

"Then tell me—what do you make of our host?"

He drained his glass and set it down. "It's funny, you asking me that, because, to tell you the truth, he rather baffles me. You know, humanity is apt to run true to type—that's to say, it's often not hard to spot the doctor, the lawyer, the soldier, the horsy man. I feel sure that Disford represents a type, but what type, I confess, eludes me."

"He told me he was once a fruit farmer on the Pacific coast."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not sure I'd recognize an American fruit farmer if I saw one. His love of punctuality and order suggest a business training. He's self-made, of course, and probably born in the Dominions—Australia, I should guess."

"Why?"

"That free-and-easiness of his is typically colonial. And I notice he's inclined to say 'prettee' and 'happee'—that's definitely Australian."

I laughed. "You're a holy terror, aren't you? Tell me about Mrs. Canning. She's American, isn't she?"

"So I believe. American by birth perhaps, but cosmopolitan by instinct."

I laughed. "She interests me. Won't you analyse her for me?"

He gave me a knowing grin. "That's too easy! Try somebody else!"

"But I want to hear about Mrs. Canning."

He chuckled. "Come, you know you've long since made up your mind about the fair Elvira." I laughed. "Barber, then."

He shot me a long look from under his bushy eyebrows. "You find him attractive, don't you, and yet hard to get on with. I'll tell you the reason—you're the same type."

"How do you mean?"

"Look at that thin nose of his—the explorer's nose. It

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stands for restlessness, resolution, foolhardiness even, and the desire to ferret things out for himself."

"But I haven't got a thin nose!"

"No. But you're enterprising, courageous, and devilish inquisitive."

"I'm *not* inquisitive!"

He chuckled. "Look at the way you've been pumping me. Come on, they're deep in their game. Let's slide off to the library!"

The library at Arkwood opened off a little, glass-domed vestibule in a passage that, facing the doors of the lounge, ran at right angles off the lounge corridor. It was a splendid room, oak-panelled with a florid Florentine ceiling. Bookcases set between the tall windows at right angles to the central aisle divided it into a series of alcoves and there were long tables down the centre, stacked with books—on one of these stood an enormous globe, very quaint and old. There appeared to be thousands of books, many of them in expensive bindings, and marble busts looked down from the tops of the bookcases.

I fell in love with the long, quiet room straight away. With its comfortable leather armchairs, soft carpet and shaded lights, it simply invited to study. If no one objected, I promised myself to do a lot of browsing there, during my stay at Arkwood.

Old Treadgold dived into one of the alcoves. I heard him mutter an exclamation.

"Hullo," he said. "It seems to be out." He showed me the gap in the line of books. "It was here the last time I was up for dinner, Sunday a week ago, because I made a mental note to borrow it some time. Several good customers of mine lost their lives when the *Lusitania* went down, and I've never read a full account of the tragedy. Never mind, we'll ask Glenn what's become of it."

He conducted me back into the central aisle where, to judge by the expensive-looking bindings, the best books were kept.

"This is the original Sedgwick library, you know," he

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explained. "Disford took it over, lock, stock and barrel, with the house. He's added to it a good deal—he collects first editions, manuscripts, too. There's an early edition of *Tristram Shandy* I covet—it's earlier than mine. I'd like to show it to you, if I can lay my hands on it."

He went drifting along the bookshelves, pulling out book after book at hazard. Some were only bound to resemble books but were in reality cases for manuscripts. Mr. Treadgold showed me wads of Kipling's marvellously neat writing, a play by J. M. Barrie, some terribly untidy manuscript of an author called Wilkie Collins—one of the fathers of detective fiction, my companion said he was—a poem of Rupert Brooke's. Sometimes old Treadgold would become absorbed in a book and leave me to poke about by myself. There were various first editions of Dickens in parts, done up in boxes, and a little slim book—Lord Byron's *Giaour*—with the Sedgwick book-plate in it; Kipling's *Soldiers Three* in paper and even first editions of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through The Looking-Glass*—at least, I took them to be first editions, they had such a quaint, old-fashioned appearance. I gave a gasp of joy, for I was brought up on Lewis Carroll, with the funny English pictures of the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter, the Queen, and all the rest.

Lumbering along presently, Mr. Treadgold found me deep in *Alice in Wonderland*. He chuckled. "What fun they are—even at my age one can still enjoy them."

He took down *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* and began to flip over the leaves.

"That was a very human touch in that war play *Journey's End*, if you ever saw it, where the fellow reads *Alice* before going over the top, to steady his nerves." He was glancing through the book. "You know, *Through the Looking-Glass* is supposed to be a chess problem—that accounts for the Kings and Queens and the Red Knight and the White Knight and all the lot of them."

When he said "the Red Knight" I suddenly thought of Danbury at the inn. I had a mental picture of the newspaper clipping he had taken from his wallet to show me—it seemed

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to emerge from the back of my mind the way photographs would slowly appear under the developer in the dark room at school in the days when I owned my first camera. I saw a headline very clearly. . . .

"But that's the name of the ship Danbury was wrecked in!" I exclaimed.

My companion bent his bushy eyebrows at me. "What is?" he demanded.

"The *Red Knight*—I can see the headline in that clipping he showed me: 'The *Red Knight* Disaster.' "

"My word," he remarked in his mild way, "Jack Hendersley will be glad to hear this; old Maggs, too. It simplifies things considerably."

"Have you ever heard of this shipwreck?"

"Very much so, though it's a long time back—twenty years, at least. She was a liner coming home from the Cape. But hold on—we ought to find something about her in one of the reference books."

He trundled off along the shelves and I saw him go in and out among the alcoves. Presently he was back with a fat volume.

"Here we are," he said, sitting down in one of the chairs. "Let's see what *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates* can tell us." He found the page he wanted, ran his finger down it. "Here we have it!"

Perched on the arm of the chair, I read over his shoulder as he read out:

"*'Red Knight. 23,000 tons. Knight Line. Ran on a reef off the Barling Islands, West coast of Portugal, homeward bound from the Cape. 373 passengers and crew lost. 12th December, 1919.'*"

With mechanical gestures my companion began to fill his pipe.

"It's coming back to me now," he remarked. "She was driven off her course in thick weather and was holed on the rocks. If it had happened at any other season they might all have been saved, for she didn't sink at once and they managed to get all the boats away; moreover, the land was

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not far off. But at night in mid-winter with a high sea running . . ." He broke off, sucking at his unlit pipe with a meditative air. "It seems to me I read something about the *Red Knight* not so long ago," he observed after a pause. "Wait a minute! Surely that's the ship a Dutch salvage firm was trying to raise. There was something in the papers about it, what, about six months ago." He looked at his watch, closed the book, and stood up.

"Well," he said, "this'll buck up our friend the Chief Constable no end. If I slip away now, I ought to catch him before he goes to bed."

"Do you think they'll be able to identify him now?"

"Without a doubt. After all, we have his photograph—dead, it's true, but recognizable. We should be able to find somebody in the employ of the Knight Line, at least, to recognize him."

At that moment the door of the library behind us closed softly. Mr. Treadgold whipped round, then looked at me. Without speaking he went to the door and opened it. The corridor was empty: across it, through the half-open door of the lounge, came the murmur of voices.

There was a tall gilt mirror with a console below it outside the library door. A book lay on the console. I pointed it out to my companion.

"Someone was bringing a book back and didn't want to disturb us," I suggested. "One of the servants, I guess." Unthinkingly, I picked up the book and glanced at the title on the cover. I showed the book to Mr. Treadgold. "There's a coincidence," I said. "It's the book you were looking for."

"God bless me, so it is!" said Mr. Treadgold.

It would probably have been an easy matter to discover just who had brought *Famous Shipwrecks* back to the library, if it had seemed of importance to either of us to make inquiries at once. Instead, we lingered chatting there.

Old Treadgold had to hunt through the index to see whether the wreck of the *Red Knight* was included. It was there all

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right and we skimmed through the chapter together—I remember there was a lot about the heroism of the Captain, Captain Gooch, who went down with the ship.

We were still talking when Lady Disford came from the hall and Mr. Treadgold said goodnight. "Better not say anything about this discovery of ours, perhaps, till the police have had a chance to inquire," was his parting injunction to me. Then our host and Barber appeared from the lounge in search of him—something about a golf match next day, and I slipped away to bed.

Chapter Eleven

I WAS undressed and in my dressing-gown brushing my hair before the mirror when my door was scratched. I heard the Wreith girl's voice: "Are you in bed yet?"

I unlocked the door. She was in a white Chinese coat over pyjamas. "Am I disturbing you?"

"Come in!"

She had an unlighted cigarette in her hand.

"Those damned maids always forget to leave any matches!" she said. I handed her my lighter. "Go on with your hair!" she said. "If I can sit down a moment—I don't feel much like sleep. How's the ankle?"

"Much better. The swelling's almost gone."

She perched herself on the couch at the end of the bed, drawing up her feet under her. "You've nice hair," she remarked. "It's worth looking after." She gazed thoughtfully up at the portrait of the Lady Althea. "That wasn't much of a show I put on this evening, was it?" she observed. She blew a cloud of smoke. "Gosh, how I hate that woman!" I did not know what to say, so went on brushing my hair. "What do you think of her?" she demanded.

I laughed. "I like her, but I wouldn't let her grab any husband of mine away."

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"Do you think Glenn's in love with her?"

"My dear, what can I possibly know about it?"

"He sees her all the time in London. She has a marvellous flat in one of those new blocks in Mayfair."

"Does your sister know?"

She nodded.

"Have the Disfords a place in London?"

She shook her head. "Glenn has an office there. But he hates London—he's happy only when he's in the country. Well?"

"If I were your sister, I'd see that I had a flat in town at least twice as expensive as Mrs. Canning's."

She uttered her dry laugh. "That's what I tell Marcia. Glenn's the sort that wants a hard slap every now and then. If he were my husband, he'd get it."

I saw her eyes harden in the mirror. Remembering my talk with Ronnie Barber, I could guess the sort of "might-have-been" that was passing through her mind, and pitied her from my heart.

"It's pretty darn crude, having her here," she went on. "But Marcia's so blah." She paused. "You see, she's never been very sure of Glenn and, as things are, she won't face a show-down."

The door was tapped. "Who is it?" said the Wreith girl.

"Is that you, Rosemary?" a cautious voice replied. "Can a bloke come in?"

"It's Eric," the Wreith girl announced. "We don't have to let him in if we don't want to."

"I don't mind if you don't . . ."

"Come in, Eric!" she said.

He was wearing a muffler and a silk flowered dressing-gown, and smoking a cigarette out of a long holder.

"Do the manners and customs of the decadent English shock our American visitor?" he demanded from the threshold.

"If she isn't past shocking after your display to-night," was Rosemary's cutting rejoinder.

"You weren't so restrained yourself," he observed, sitting down on my bed. "What happened to you afterwards?"

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"I went as far as the Prince Consort's Walk to cool off." He flicked a flake of tobacco from his lip. "I could kill Glenn and that trollop of his."

"Do we have to get dramatic about it?"

"You'd get dramatic if you knew as much about it as I do."

"Suppose you tell us what you do know?"

He shook his head. Rosemary laughed. "You needn't be coy in front of Clarissa. After the abominable scene she had to witness to-night, she's quite one of the family. Aren't you, Clarissa?"

He glowered at her. "I wish you'd be serious. Doesn't it mean anything to you that Marcia's eating her heart out over this business?"

"You know it does. And you don't make it any the easier or her, the way you're behaving."

His glance prickled with resentment. "I'd take her away from it all to-morrow if she'd listen to me."

Her laugh was scornful. "My poor, good Eric, if you think Marcia could live on your five hundred a year, or whatever it is, after what she's been accustomed to here!"

The blood welled into his face and he sprang up.

"I loathe your beastly materialism. After all, there are worse things than being poor." He strode to the door. "I suppose you think it nothing that the Canning woman visits Glenn in that ground-floor suite of his at night? But maybe it's one of the things Marcia's accustomed to here, as you put it?"

The Wreith girl reddened. "How do you know?"

He laughed bitterly. "There's not much going on in this house I don't know. Perhaps you didn't hear Laura to-night, accusing me of borrowing that ghastly Italian cape of hers, simply because she found it sopping wet this morning?"

Rosemary laughed. "It wouldn't be the first time, Eric. Both you and Ronnie fancy yourselves in that Bersagliere cloak, Laura tells me."

His brow darkened. "Well, we're not the only ones."

"Meaning what?"

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"Maybe I could tell her of someone else who borrows that cape of hers to cross the quad at night when it's raining."

"Don't talk in riddles. Come on, I'll buy it!"

"Oh, let it go!" he snarled, and moved towards the door. He stopped in front of me. "It's a shame to inflict all this dirty linen on you and I apologize," he said.

"Just a minute, Eric!" cried Rosemary. But with a brusque "Good night!" he vanished noiselessly.

The Wreith girl wriggled her shoulders and tapped out another cigarette on the back of her case. "Glenn has a bedroom and bath attached to that workroom of his where you saw him this afternoon," she explained. "Sometimes when he's working late he sleeps there, so as not to disturb Marcia. Eric is in this wing the same as you, but on the floor above, the room at the end of the corridor with a window looking diagonally across the quad to the entrance to Glenn's suite. He's evidently seen something."

"What did he mean by that about Miss Verge's cape?"

She gave another shrug. "Elvira has the room below Eric's on this floor. If she really visits Glenn in his suite at night, her best way from her bedroom is down the south wing stairs and across the quad—she might bump into someone if she went through the house. That cape of Laura's usually hangs in the cloakroom at the foot of the south wing stairs. If it were raining, one might easily borrow it to cross the quad with." She smothered a yawn and rose to her feet. "Well, I'm for bed. I expect you're dying with sleep."

"I'm not, honestly. I slept most of the day."

"You're starting with Tris in the morning—you'll want to be fresh. I'm sorry I let Eric come busting in here like that—I don't know what you must be thinking of us all." She gave me her reluctant smile and slipped away.

I locked the door. My blessed watch was busted, but as I moved from the door I heard a clock strike somewhere in the recesses of the house. I counted twelve. Midnight. I realized that I was wide awake and in no mood for bed—what a long time it seemed to breakfast! I went into the

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bathroom and washed out some stockings, then, sitting at my charming little desk, took a sheet of the very swell-looking Arkwood notepaper and finished off the letter to my mother I had started at the inn. I told her about the murder but played down my part in it, so as not to alarm her unduly. Then because, I suppose, I was feeling a bit homesick, I decided to be magnanimous and write to Elmer. By the time I had told him of my adventure and the job it had led to, and described the magnificence surrounding me, I had covered four pages and the distant clock had struck one. So I wound up my letter and, deciding to read in bed, looked around for my *Famous Shipwrecks* book, which I thought I had brought up with me.

I then discovered I must have left the darn book downstairs.

This was tragedy. Like all people who normally sleep well, the thought of a sleepless night terrifies me. There was not a book of any description in my room and the prospect of facing all those hours until the morning with nothing to read seemed to make me more starkly wakeful, more vibrating with nerves from head to foot than ever.

I knew where I must have left the book—on the gilt table under the mirror at the library door—and I remembered where the library was situated. From the corridor outside the lounge a broad passage ran off at right-angles widening into the little vestibule with a glass dome where the library entrance was situated. Beyond the vestibule the corridor turned off to the left, leading as I imagined, to the other wing. The south wing stairs, as they called them, just beyond my room, brought one down to the lounge corridor and, once there, I had only to follow it along to reach the cross-corridor and the little vestibule where I had left the book.

A silver candlestick and a box of matches stood beside the bed. I lit the candle and opened the door. The darkness and silence of the passage was rather scary, but a little radiance came from the stairs and, as I ran softly down, I saw that a lamp was still burning below. The lights were out in the corridor but, with the aid of my candle, I made my way to the library vestibule.

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The book was not there.

Determined not to be beaten, now that I had come so far, I pushed open the library door. The room was dark but my candle showed me the switches and, as the light went on, almost the first thing I perceived was *Famous Shipwrecks* reposing on a pile of books on the nearest table, where some tidy person had evidently placed it. I grabbed it up, but I did not leave at once. I lingered there, gazing at all those solemn books in their rows behind gilt wires, and savouring the cloistered atmosphere of the place, until a grandmother clock behind me struck twice melodiously and I saw that it was half-past one. On that I put out the light and, my book under my arm, set off back to bed.

I realized afterwards that, with my thoughts still straying among the books, I must have turned right in the little domed vestibule instead of left. I did not notice my mistake until I found myself looking in vain for the stairs by which I had come down. Instead, a passage ran straight along to a white door from which, as I pattered along in my slippered feet, still rather lame, a murmur of voices proceeded. I then perceived that I had strayed into the corridor leading to Disford's suite in the north wing. At the same moment a figure glided out of the shadows at the end of the gallery where Disford's study lay, and came swiftly towards me.

At first I thought it was Eric, doing a little reconnoitring. But it was not Eric—it was Ronnie Barber. He was fully dressed, in his dinner clothes. Bearing down on me, he took me by the arm without a word and fairly ran me along to the other end of the passage and through a swing door into the main entrance hall. His manner was so urgent, his face so troubled, that I let him have his way without protest.

Once we were in the hall he rounded on me. "What are you doing out of your bed at this time of night?"

"I went to the library to get a book."

"This isn't the way to the library. Who sent you to spy on me?"

I said: "Don't be absurd. I got lost, trying to locate the

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stairs. If it comes to spying, what do you think you're doing, wandering around in the dark?"

He reddened and his eyes fell away. "Be a good sport," he pleaded, "and don't mention to a soul that you've seen me here." He saw that I was about to speak and stopped me with his hand. "And don't ask questions!" He raised his eyes to mine: he had a very steady gaze. "There's a perfectly good explanation," he said, "only I can't give it to you. Promise you won't give me away!"

I did not have to ask him what the explanation was: I realized that Eric Clayden was not the only one who was interested in Mrs. Canning's visits to our host after the rest of the house had gone to bed. I was aware of a feeling of annoyance—it seemed so stupid that an intelligent man like that should fall for this adventuress: of disgust, too—I found this keyhole business pretty horrible in the circumstances. So I said to him: "I'm not in the least interested as to how you or anybody else in this house behave. All I want from you is to be shown the way back to my room."

His eyebrows went up at my tone and he gave me a searching glance: then he took my candle from me.

"We'll go up by the main stairs," he announced, and led the way up. At the top, through various dark and deserted corridors he brought me to my door. "Good night!" he said, handing me back my candlestick. I sailed past him and went in. But before I could close the door he was gone and I heard the rapid patter of his feet descending the south wing stairs.

Chapter Twelve

IN the light of the tragic events that were to befall I realize that, to set them down in proper sequence, I must get some chronological order into my story. Let me say, therefore, that the murder at the Sedgwicke Arms took place on

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Tuesday, the 18th of July; I arrived at Arkwood the next day, Wednesday, and started working for Tristram Wace on the following morning—Thursday.

Tristram Wace was fifty-four years old (he looked sixty-four) and a bachelor, born in the West Indies and educated in France, after which he went to Oxford. He hated Americans, Germans, Jews, Nonconformists, butcher's-meat, the radio, modern painting and George Bernard Shaw. All this, and much more about him, I learned in the first hour we spent together down in his cottage near the Burstowe gate.

He had a fantastically quick mind. It seemed to move with the speed of light. He was outrageously impatient, with about as much self-restraint as a charging bull, and when a lesser intelligence, such as mine, failed to keep pace with his, he did not hesitate to say so with devastating bluntness.

The work was highly technical, involving the analysis of a mass of company reports and the tabulation of results according to a fairly intricate plan of his devising. He explained it all to me very fast—eyes swirling, features working—and I very soon discovered that to stay his flow with even the simplest question was asking for trouble.

He would break off to ejaculate, with a glassy stare: "What a blithering idiot!" or, more violently: "Jumping Jeremiah, the girl's a fool!"—I could understand why my predecessors had quit. But I was determined to stick it.

I perceived that he was giving me enough work to last me, not the six weeks to two months of which Miss Verge had spoken as the probable length of my engagement, but more like two years. I concentrated accordingly on his tabulation scheme so that I should at least be able to make a stab at getting out the résumé of a file of reports—they were Burmese Tin Companies—which, he said, I was to take to Sir Glenn in his study at six o'clock that evening.

He left me at last—as he told me, to go up to the house and see Sir Glenn—and I had the cottage to myself. It stood in a small plantation. Trees were all about—with its neat front garden, its cottage door that opened in two pieces,

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its low ceiling and lozenged window-panes, it was straight out of a Morland print. It was a one-room cottage with a divan bed and though a bare two minutes' walk from the house, situated as it was on the far side of the Prince Consort's Walk, in its rustic simplicity it seemed centuries away from the splendours of Arkwood. Yet the modern world was very near, for this was the shallowest part of the park and the village street, with the clank of an occasional lorry or the hoot of a passing car only just at the back. Wace showed me some chimney-stacks visible above the trees which, he said, was the Sedgwick Arms. A door in the park wall behind the cottage opened almost into the inn yard—they habitually used it at Arkwood as a short cut to the village, he told me.

I worked, it might be for half-an-hour, in perfect peace, the chatter of the birds in the wood accompanying the tapping of my machine, when a shadow darkened the doorway. Looking up, I saw Mrs. Canning smiling her pearliest smile at me over the half-door. She was in bright blue beach pyjamas and a matelot vest, and a large bag in blue towelling from which the end of a towel protruded, dangled on rings from her bare arms. "All alone?"

"Uh-huh!"

"I wanted a word with you." She unlatched the half-door and came in. "I want you to do something for me. Will you?"

"I'll be glad to, if I can."

She glanced over her shoulder then opened her handbag and drew out a square white envelope sealed in red wax. "Will you take care of this envelope for me? It needn't be for long—only a week or two."

I hesitated—it seemed such a strange request to make to a complete stranger. "Well . . ." I began.

Once more she glanced behind her. Then lowering her voice, she said: "Honey, I'm in a bit of a spot. I want to get rid of this envelope and get rid of it now. I've a feeling that nothing can happen to me as long as it's out of my possession, in a safe place." She looked at me eagerly.

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"But what is it?" I asked.

"Just some papers I don't want to go astray. Say you'll do this for me, Clarissa." She pushed the envelope into my unwilling hands. It was rather heavy, and firm and compact to the touch.

"I'll take charge of it if you like," I said, "but after all I'm a complete stranger here and you know nothing about me. Besides, what could happen to you?"

She veiled her green eyes and her husky voice sank to a whisper. "I don't know, but I'm kind of rattled. They're all against me in this house—Marcy; that sulky sister of hers; Laura Verge; Eric—that wet smack—and even crazy old Wace."

"Well," I said, "can you wonder?"

She shook her head. "Perhaps not, because I mean to marry Glenn Disford, you know. It's a crime to see a brilliant man like Glenn buried in the country like this. Marcia's nice enough and pretty enough, but she's no good to Glenn. Why, she can't even bear him a child! Glenn should be in parliament—a man with his brains and drive belongs in the Cabinet. And when Marcy divorces him and he marries me, he'll be there, because I shall see to it. He's likely to get his peerage within the next few years—don't you think I make a better Lady Arkwood than poor Marcy?"

"Oh, dear, I wish you hadn't told me all this!"

She gave her crooning laugh. "You were frank with me so I've been frank with you." She pressed my hand. "Go on, be a sport, Clarissa. Keep that envelope for me like a dear. It'll only be for a little while—in a week or two I'll be claiming it back from you. After all, Americans always stand by one another in trouble and this is where I need a friend. They're all conspiring against me: they spy on me—I'm not even sure of Ronnie Barber any more. Do this little favour for poor Elvira, honey, and you won't regret it!"

She was deeply in earnest: her eyes glistened. After the frank way in which she had exposed her hand I suppose I should have refused to have anything to do with it, seeing

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that I was the guest of the woman whose husband she was planning to steal. But she was in such obvious distress and I could not help remembering her extraordinary kindness to me about the frock; besides, she had a persuasive quality about her that was almost irresistible. I suppose it was stupidly weak of me and pretty rotten; but I told myself that all these intrigues were really no concern of mine when it came to returning a fellow American a favour and I gave way. "Oh, all right," I said, and, drawing my handbag towards me as it lay beside my machine, I thrust the envelope in it out of sight.

Her manner changed on the instant. She was like a happy child, blushing and clapping her hands with delight. "That's swell of you. And you won't breathe a word to a soul?"

"All right. But the sooner you take your property back again, the better I shall be pleased."

She stood up then. "You've lifted a load off my mind. Thanks a thousand times." She looked herself over then, impulsively, loosed a bangle from her wrist. It was a charming thing, hung with gold and enamel charms set with small rubies and brilliants. "For you!" she exclaimed, dangling it in front of me.

I drew back. "Thanks. I couldn't really. You're always giving me things."

"Nonsense! I'm sick to death of it." She tried to clasp it on my wrist, but I resisted.

A voice, mocking, supercilious, spoke from the door.

"Is it Nausicaa at ball with her maidens, or the ladies' all-in wrestling?"

Elvira Canning whirled about. "Eric!" she exclaimed. "I thought I told you to go on down to the lake!"

Clayden was there, leaning against the door-post with his most imperturbable air. He wore a bright yellow pullover, and blue shorts revealing a lot of white hairless leg.

"And I thought I'd wait for you, my poppet," he replied and yawned. "It's nice and fresh in the wood."

"If I'd wanted you to wait, I'd have told you. I hate being spied on."

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He laughed. "If you want to know, I was watching the birds. Birds always fascinate me. Especially cuckoos."

"Why cuckoos?"

He sniggered. "They're so gloriously amoral, always trying to butt into other birds' nests."

I had already decided that I did not like Eric Clayden much. His wit and high spirits seemed to me to cover up a good deal of falseness and, as I had heard Marcia tell him to his face, he certainly had a poisonous tongue. With set face, Elvira Canning picked up her bag.

"Well, do we go in swimming or don't we?" she demanded.

"But of course. Rosemary's been down there for ages."

They went off then: it was only after they had departed that I found she had left the bangle on the desk. I let it lie and returned to my machine, glad to be rid of them. But scarcely had I sat down when a cheerful voice exclaimed: "O-oh, Granny, what big eyes you have!"

This time it was Ronnie Barber, immaculate in grey flannels and a navy shirt with a blue-and-white scarf. He had a towel and swimming trunks slung round his neck.

"If every one of you people is coming calling every time you go in swimming, I shall have to find some other place to work," I told him.

He did not stop to unlatch the half-door but clambered over. "Has Elvira Canning been with you?" he asked.

"Will you please go away and let me get on with my typing?"

He cocked his head at me. "I suppose you're absolutely revolted by my behaviour last night?"

"You take the words out of my mouth."

"You don't believe it when I tell you I have a perfectly good excuse."

"I can't think of any good excuse for spying on people, especially your host."

He nodded. "You're dead right." Then he saw the bangle lying on the desk. "That's Elvira's. What's it doing here?"

"She dropped it——" I broke off short, seeing the trap. But it was too late.

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"Then she *was* here? What did she want?" he cried.

"She merely wanted to pass the time of day, the same as yourself. We're always delighted to receive visitors." I put the bangle away in my bag.

He ignored my sarcasm. "I wish you'd tell me the truth. I've a special reason for asking."

"You have special reasons for so many odd things you do, haven't you?"

The thrust went home. He coloured. "Is that supposed to be funny?"

"I'm afraid I don't see anything funny in listening at doors and following people around."

He said violently: "I wish to goodness I'd never got you here!"

"You didn't. It was Mr. Treadgold who came to my rescue. But then he has such good manners, don't you think?"

"Meaning that I haven't—is that it?"

"On a boat, perhaps, but not on land." He glared at me, frowning. "And now may I be allowed to go on with my work?" I wound up.

"I don't care a damn what you do!" he cried and flung out. I gave him time to get clear of the cottage, then drew Elvira Canning's envelope from my bag and examined it. She had told me that it contained papers: by the feel of it the contents might have been a packet of letters or even a small box—perhaps a jewellery case. There was nothing written on the outside. The seal at the back showed a Gothic "E" and "C" interlaced. Well, Barber might have his special reasons for being interested in the dazzling Mrs. Canning, I told myself but, cocksure and conceited as he was, at least he did not know everything there was to know about her.

I put the envelope back in my bag and returned to my typing, and for about five minutes had peace. The next thing I knew, there was Wace striding in, looking more like an Easter Island idol than ever, and chattering to himself. He stood over me, pulling faces and grinding his teeth.

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"Blast him for a dirty crook!" he burst out. "What's a beggarly fifteen-hundred pounds to him! Yet he proposes to swindle me out of it—my lawfully-earned commission! May his flesh rot from his bones! And I'm to sit back and do nothing. Well, I won't, by the Lord Harry!" He brought his fist crashing down on the desk. "Damn it, girl, are you dumb? Why can't you say something?"

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about, Mr. Wace," said I, trying to smooth him down.

"I'm talking about Sir Glenn Disford, Knight, the g-r-reat financier and our much respected host, who'd stoop to gypping a fellow out of a just debt!" he roared back at me. "But I know who I've to thank for it—it's that damned woman!"

"Do you think you should speak so loudly?"

"I'll speak as loudly as I please. Just because I told Glenn what I thought of him, having her down here, she's got it in for me—and unless you're blind as well as stupid, you must know that she twines the poor fool round her little finger. I had an appointment with him for eleven—a business appointment to discuss my commission over the Kolobangi deal—but do you suppose I could get in? Or Laura Verge, who wanted to do his letters? No—there the pair of us had to kick our heels in the corridor, simply because Madam had taken it into her head to call on him. And when after a full hour she sails out and we're admitted to the presence, by the red-hot elephants of hell, he's a mass of jitters, as he always is when they've been rowing, and he proceeds to take it out first on Laura, then on me!" He growled with fury. "But I'll show her!"

"What you have to do," I suggested, "is to sit down and cool off. Give me your hat!"

Scowling, he relinquished his panama. But he did not sit down. Instead he rumbled: "How about a drink?"

I shook my head. "Not for me. Not in working hours."

He grunted and went to a wall-cupboard. I heard the "glug-glug" of liquid being poured and tactfully bent over the keys of my machine. Presently he returned to his writing-table against the wall, and thereafter the pair of us worked

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in silence until the distant booming of a gong summoned us to lunch.

Wace declared he did not want any lunch, but told me to go. So I walked up through the plantation alone. There seemed to be a lot of people on the terrace, so I dodged round to the main entrance and slipped up to my room—my idea was to be rid of Mrs. Canning's envelope as soon as possible. The first thing I saw was that my trunk had arrived from London. It was stacked neatly against the wall with a chintz cover over it, and when I opened the wardrobe it was to discover that most of my things had been laid tidily away—by the invaluable Cox, I supposed. I had the envelope in my hand and was trying to think of a suitable hiding-place when I heard a step outside. I hastily thrust the envelope under a heap of underwear and turned round.

Miss Verge was at the door.

"I wanted to tell you," she said, "the car's ordered for a quarter-to-three. You won't keep G.D. waiting, will you? It makes him so cross." Seeing that I did not follow her, she went on: "For the inquest, you know. It's at three. Didn't anyone tell you? G.D. and I are going with you."

"Oh, my gracious!" I had forgotten about the inquest. I looked down at my gay tweed. "Oughtn't I to change into a dark suit? Have I time?" I began to root among my dresses hanging in the wardrobe.

"There's a crowd for lunch: they won't be going in for ten minutes yet. That black frock with the linen collar and cuffs would be just the thing."

I was out of my skirt in a minute. Miss Verge sat on the bed smoking a cigarette, and watched me.

"How did you make out with old Wace?" she wanted to know.

"All right. Once I get the hang of the work, I shall manage."

"I hope you're accurate. G.D. hates careless typing."

"I think I am. In a brokerage office you have to be, you know."

She nodded. "Old Tris is a handful, isn't he?"

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I laughed. "He takes some getting used to, but I think I can handle him."

"He's a tactless old brute. He had a rare blow-up with G.D. this morning. I suppose he told you?"

"He did say something about it."

"About Mrs. Canning, too?"

"Well . . ."

She gave her gruff laugh. "You don't have to be discreet with me, my dear. I know the old devil—he blabs everything. I hope you're not the sort to repeat things you hear."

"I'm not—honestly."

She smiled at me indulgently as I arranged my hair in the glass.

"I don't think you are. You mustn't let old Wace or any of them put you against Sir Glenn. If you'd known him as long as I have you'd realize that, if ever there was a man whose bark is worse than his bite, it's Glenn Disford."

"You've been with him a long time, haven't you?"

"Twelve years in March. He's come to depend on me for most things. Besides looking after his correspondence, I pay the servants, do his income-tax, attend to his insurances and even order his shirts—I don't know what he'd do without me. We have our little spats"—she laughed—"well, you've seen him and you know the way he flies off the handle. But he's a grand person and it infuriates me when people who are his guests, enjoying his hospitality, start running him down. You're a young thing, Clarissa, and maybe you don't realize the importance of loyalty. It's a rare quality, one of the rarest qualities in life."

"Well, you have it, haven't you? You're tremendously loyal to Sir Glenn, aren't you?"

"It's more than that," she said very simply. "I'm very fond of G.D. He has his faults, but they're on the surface. Underneath, he has a broad streak of kindness and—affection. You know he's devoted to his wife, don't you?"

I suppose my assent to her statement sounded grudging—I was thinking, rather remorsefully, of that envelope among my panties—for she said quickly:

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"Maybe he's a bit dazzled for the moment—you know what men are, especially married men. But it's no more than that. His whole life centres round Lady Disford. I'd like you to realize that."

She broke off. "Ready? My, how smart you look in that little frock!" She slipped her arm in mine. "Come, we'll go down to lunch."

Chapter Thirteen

I HAVE read somewhere that it was a famous English headmaster—I think the name was Arnold—who first made the repression of the emotions one of the main planks of the English character. We Americans don't understand the system very well, maybe, because we are more on the surface; but it certainly works smoothly on occasion.

We must have been twenty for lunch, counting the house-party which was present in full strength. I didn't hear any of the names, but there was a parson who had something to do with the Maiden Shapley Hospital, and a bossy woman who was one of the local A.R.P. organizers, besides some girls and men.

I must say I handed it to those Arkwood folk. Even to me, the stranger, the growing tension between the various members of our small party was evident; but by not so much as the flutter of an eyelid did one of them betray it.

Luncheon was a light-hearted meal with laughter and jokes, all smiling faces and pleasant, well-bred voices. And Elvira Canning, seated between Eric Clayden and the parson, was the gayest of the lot.

She went with us to the inquest. It was held in the village club, in a long room of pitch-pine that smelt faintly of old clothes and carbolic, with benches and tables thrust away in corners, and dartboards and portraits of King George and Queen Elizabeth on the walls.

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The arrival of the Arkwood Rolls Royce brought my handsome Constable Savage galloping to the door. He escorted us to the front row of chairs, where we found the Chief Constable and my nice Mr. Treadgold already installed.

The small hall was crowded, but I picked out the little hump-back from the Sedgwicke Arms, in his Sunday suit with his hair slicked down and the florid Superintendent Maggs talking earnestly to a large, red-faced man in blue serge behind the Coroner's table.

Soon after us Rosemary, flanked by Ronnie Barber and Eric Clayden, arrived and the three of them were shown into chairs behind us. Our hostess and Wace were the only members of the house-party who failed to appear.

Mr. Treadgold made room for me beside him. "Don't look so worried," he said to me behind his hand. "You won't be wanted to-day. They've called in Scotland Yard."

"Scotland Yard?" I was impressed.

"Yes. That's Chief Inspector Manderton talking to Maggs. He'll ask for a week's adjournment pending inquiries." He lowered his voice. "They've identified that poor devil, thanks to you and my idea about the book."

"No?"

"It's a fact. His real name's Woodman. He's a *Red Knight* survivor all right. He was the purser's steward."

A scrubby man was gabbling something from a paper—I caught only the opening words because we have them in our Courts in America. "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" Then there was a lot of confusion—they were calling over the jury, Mr. Treadgold explained to me—and the Coroner, a hearty-looking chap in a grey suit and horn-rimmed glasses, mumbled a short address that I did not follow very well, but I gathered he was telling the jury about the murder. The next thing we knew Constable Savage, with his cap off, was being sworn. He reeled off what sounded like a set speech—something about being summoned "on the noight of the eighteenth" to the Sedgwicke Arms—but his dialect was so thick I scarcely understood a word. It was as bad with Bunting who followed, but I grasped that he was telling about Danbury's arrival

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at the inn on the evening of the murder. The moment he had sat down, the Scotland Yard man bobbed up, barked out a sentence, the Coroner droned again and, with a great scraping of chairs, we were all filing out into the hot afternoon sunshine.

Sir Glenn went aside with the Chief Constable and Mr. Treadgold. Maggs and the Scotland Yard man joined them and Maggs presented the Inspector from London who, I noticed, appeared to be a friend of old Treadgold's. Then I caught sight of Major Hendersley beckoning. I went across. "This is Miss Pell," he said to the Scotland Yard man, and introduced him to me.

Chief Inspector Manderton was as solid as a wall. Everything about him was heavy—face, chin, moustache, body. Even his clothes were heavy—thick blue serge, although it was a sweltering day, massive, square-toed boots. He had a broad, red face fluted with a mass of little blue veins, and sharp, suspicious eyes. Cops all over the world are pretty hard-boiled, I guess—they have to be; and this Manderton looked as hard-boiled as a State trooper, and that's saying something.

"The Inspector was wondering," said the Chief Constable, "whether you'd go along with him as far as the Sedgwick Arms and show him just where this mysterious figure was standing when you saw it."

"I'm quite agreeable."

"How about the ankle?" Mr. Treadgold, with a smile, wanted to know.

"It's much better. I can manage."

It seemed that Sir Glenn and the two men had a foursome arranged for half-past three. Ronnie Barber, who obviously wanted to accompany us, was for calling it off. But the Inspector said that there was no need for Sir Glenn to stay, and the three men departed in the Rolls. Miss Verge declared she would not let me go alone, then Rosemary and Mrs. Canning wanted to come along, and it ended by us four women, escorted by Mr. Treadgold, setting out in a body. Inspector Manderton, who had gone into a huddle with Superintendent

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Maggs and the Chief Constable, said he would join us presently.

Rosemary remarked as we strolled along the village street: "They've got the Boy Scouts out, hunting through the undergrowth like a pack of hounds. They're looking for the knife, I suppose. It's too dramatic! I wonder if they'll use bloodhounds. Do you think they'll use bloodhounds, Uncle Toby?"

Mr. Treadgold laughed. "I should doubt whether the resources of the local police, so indefatigably presided over by the invaluable Maggs, run to such engaging quadrupeds."

"Surely before they use the dogs, they have to have something belonging to the murderer to track with?" Mrs. Canning put in.

"Well," I said, "maybe they're on their way to finding him, now that they know who the dead man really is."

"They've identified him, have they?" Laura Verge interposed.

"So Mr. Treadgold tells me," I answered. "We found a book in the library all about famous shipwrecks, and I was able to remember the name of the shipwreck this poor creature was in. It was the *Red Knight* disaster, back in nineteen-nineteen."

"He was the purser's steward. His real name's Alfred Frederick Woodman," said Mr. Treadgold. "I've had a look at that wound in his back and I'd lay a small shade of odds he was killed with a seaman's knife, and the police-surgeon agrees with me."

"This is a horrible conversation. Do we have to go on with it?" Mrs. Canning demanded plaintively.

They had roped off the inn and under the stares of the usual cluster of idlers a policeman guarded it. He seemed to recognize our party, for he lifted the rope for us and we went round to the side of the house where some tumble-down stables and open sheds enclosed the yard. There were more policemen here and two men in cloth caps measuring the ground with a tape. One of them came forward on our

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approach, but one of the policemen said: "It's the party from Arkwood," and the man went back to his measuring.

On the far side of the yard was a row of trees and behind the trees a decrepit fence with an iron gate. From the gate a narrow path trodden in the grass coiled its way through some hillocky, broken ground where, heads down, four or five small boys were wandering about. Arising above the grassy knolls was the high line of an old red-brick wall. We went as far as the gate and leaned on it, waiting for the Inspector to show up and watching the urchins at work.

"Is that the park wall?" I asked the Wreith girl.

"That's right. There's a door in the wall that brings you into the park just at the back of old Tris's cottage." She called one of the boys over. "Hey, Dickie! Found anything?"

The youngster shook his head. "Naw, miss. Leastwise, oi ain't! But Ginger Baker, 'e found zummat!" He raised a piercing treble. "Oi, Ginger!"

A skinny little boy with flaming red hair came loping up.

"Show the lady the button!" the other commanded.

A small, grubby hand was thrust into a shirt pocket and a silver button about as big as a quarter was dropped into Rosemary's outstretched palm. A wisp of dark cloth was still adhering to the shank.

"It's off a soldier's uniform," the Wreith girl pointed out. "Look, there's a bomb, or whatever you call it, on it."

"British soldiers wear brass, not silver, buttons," said Mr. Treadgold. "Allow me!" He took the button. I saw that he had a jeweller's glass in his hand, and he now screwed it in his eye. "Oh, Miss Verge!" he called.

Laura Verge had left us and was fondling a depressed-looking dog that had appeared from nowhere. "What is it?" she asked.

"Isn't it you who own an Italian officer's cape?"

"Why, yes. What of it?"

"Have you lost a button off it by any chance?"

"Not that I know of."

He showed her the button. "That silver grenade's surely

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Italian and so would the fragment of cloth on the shank appear to be."

She took the button and scrutinized it. "It certainly looks like one of mine."

"One would say it had been torn off when the cape caught in a bush." He turned to Ginger. "Where did you find it, sonny?"

The child jerked a thumb backward. "Back there boi pa-ark door, mister."

Laura Verge jiggled the button in her palm. "Well, of course, we're in and out of that door all day. Thanks—those buttons are probably impossible to replace over here. Wait a minute, Ginger!" She opened her purse.

"That's all right," said Mr. Treadgold. "Here you are, Tommy!" He flipped the urchin a shilling. At the same moment Inspector Manderton's red face appeared over his shoulder. "A button," Mr. Treadgold explained. "This boy found it by the park door. It seems to be off an Italian officer's cape belonging to Miss Verge. You know Miss Verge, I think?"

"Certainly," was the unsmiling answer. "Allow me!" He took the button and examined it with an abstracted air, then slipped it in his pocket. On that he swung to me with a brusqueness that made me jump. "Now then, miss, would you be kind enough to show me just where the figure you spoke of was standing when you saw it on Tuesday night?"

I moved towards the inn, my eye raking the line of dormer windows, one of them that of the room I had occupied. "About here," I said, stopping.

"Where did it appear to come from?"

"Well," I answered, considering. "It's not very easy to tell, as I saw it at most for only a second or two. My room was dark, but a little light was shining from Danbury's window next door. The figure seemed to step into the light and fade into the darkness again. I should say it came from the direction of those trees." I pointed to the line of trees masking the stable-yard wall.

"Did you see the face?"

"No."

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The Inspector frowned. "At least it would have shown as a patch of white," he suggested irritably.

"I don't remember it. I guess the figure must have had its back turned to me."

Manderton turned to Superintendent Maggs. "What's beyond those trees?"

"Just a field with a footpath leading to the park at Arkwood," said the Superintendent.

"Show me!"

We moved over to the gate again. Mr. Treadgold detached a wire fastening and we all walked in Indian file along the path, the two police officers in front. They masked the view, and I suppose we had gone about fifty yards when from the crest of a hillock I found myself looking down on the park wall and, at the foot of the path, a small door in it.

As we stood bunched there, the boy Ginger thrust himself forward. The ground all about was a tangle of ferns and blackberry bushes. One of these bushes grew beside the door with long brambles that brushed the door-posts.

Pointing at the bush, the urchin exclaimed importantly: "That's where oi found un!"

"Show us, son!" said Mr. Treadgold.

I left him stooping over the bush with the youngster and turned my attention back to the Scotland Yard man.

"Is this door in use?" he asked in his brusque, impersonal style.

"Oh, yes," Miss Verge explained. "If any of us are walking to the village or the golf links we always come this way—that may be how I came to lose a button off my cape here." Manderton's large red hand grasped the handle. "We keep it locked. I have a key," Miss Verge said. She brought out a Yale key from the pocket of her suit and opened the door.

A moss-grown walk was disclosed all dappled with the sunlight falling through the trees. The low red roof of Wace's cottage appeared where the path vanished among the verdure.

For all his stodgy air, the Scotland Yard man had a gimlet eye. His movements were slow, but his glance was rapid. He flashed it over the door, swinging it to. "Spring lock.

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"You don't want a key to get out," he remarked, then lifted his eyes along the path. "What's that house?"

"Mr. Wace, a friend of Sir Glenn Disford's, lives there. Sir Glenn lends it to him," replied Laura Verge.

The Inspector nodded. "That'll be all, thank you, miss," he told me and, turning on his heel, went off by the way we had come with Maggs and Mr. Treadgold, who was waiting outside.

The Wreith girl laughed. "Chatty bloke!" she observed.

Elvira Canning shuddered. "What an odious man! He gives me the creeps. What does he want, poking about in the park like this?"

Laura Verge shrugged her shoulders. "These people are used to exploring every possibility. Perhaps he thinks the murderer came this way, from the park!" She spoke in her ordinary tone, crisp, a little gruff. Her words had a curious effect on Mrs. Canning. I happened to be looking at her: she seemed to catch her breath and she shot a long, questioning glance at Laura out of eyes that were shadowed with fear. I remember thinking how attractive she looked that afternoon, in a plain little suit of hunting green. She was carrying her hat, and the sun, slanting down through the leaves, made her hair shine like the finest pale gold.

They left me at my Hansel and Gretel cottage and I went back to my work with a vague sense of excitement. Nothing very much had ever happened to me before; but now I had been mixed up in a murder and had enjoyed the thrill of being cross-examined by a Scotland Yard man, all within a few days. Mrs. Pell's little girl was certainly seeing life, I told myself.

Chapter Fourteen

I HAD a bit of a struggle to get my reports ready for Sir Glenn by six o'clock as promised. Much to my relief old Wace did not come back to delay me. But even though I gave tea a miss, it was a minute or two past six o'clock by the time I had whipped the last sheet out of the type-

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writer. Hastily binding the work together and not stopping for a final revision, I set off at a brisk hobble for the house.

I crossed the Prince Consort's Walk and entered the gardens without meeting a soul. But as I reached the top of the steps I saw my host on the terrace. He was stretched full length in a deck-chair under one of the gay umbrellas, with a drink in his hand. "It's those reports you wanted, Sir Glenn," I said as I came up to him.

He put up a casual hand to take them. "I told you I'd be in my study, but it was so fine I came outside. Drink?" He indicated the tray with whisky and syphon on the table at his elbow.

"No, thank you, Sir Glenn."

He became absorbed in the papers I had brought, fingering his moustache, and from time to time sipping his highball. "You might mix me another," he bade me, pushing his empty glass towards me presently without lifting his eyes from his reading.

I mixed him a drink, but no sooner had he tasted it when he growled: "For Pete's sake, young woman, you'd want a life-belt to down that! Are you afraid of spoiling the taste of the soda? Go on, fill it up, damn it!"

As I splashed some more whisky in under his peevish scrutiny, I noticed that the bottle was half empty and that its torn capsule lay on the salver beside it. I had a sudden suspicion that he had consumed half the bottle there at the one sitting: at any rate, it appeared to me, now that I looked at him more closely, that he was not entirely sober.

He gulped down half the drink at one swallow then, laying the reports aside, motioned me imperiously to a chair.

"So Danbury, or whatever he called himself, was in the *Red Knight* wreck?" he grunted. "The police have you to thank for that information, Treadgold tells me."

"That's right, Sir Glenn!"

"What did he say about the wreck, hey? Tell me just what he said."

"Nothing very much. He showed me some press clippings——"

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"Aye, I know that. But what did he say?"

"He told me a terrible story about some poor woman who tried to hang on to a spar he was clinging to. There wasn't room for both of them, so he hit her over the head. Some millionaire's wife, I think he said she was—he made my blood run cold, the way he gloated."

Disford grunted. "That's the way it is, though—it's every man for himself in moments like that. But go on, tell me the story exactly as he told it—and anything else you can remember he said about the *Red Knight*."

So in that heavenly spot, with the song of the birds and the distant rustle of the fountain in my ears, I had to conjure up once more that ghastly vision of the sea. I had just finished when we saw the butler approaching from the house.

"What is it, Havilland?" Disford barked.

"Inspector Manderton on the phone, Sir Glenn."

"What the devil does he want?"

"He asked for Mrs. Canning, Sir Glenn."

Disford glared at him. "For Mrs. Canning. What can he want with her?"

"He didn't say, sir. When I told him madam was out, he asked for you."

"You didn't tell him I was in, did you?"

"No, Sir Glenn."

Disford turned to me. "I don't want to talk to the fellow. Find out what it's all about, will you, Miss Pell?"

Havilland led the way to the instrument which was in a little room off the hall.

I said to Manderton: "This is Miss Pell speaking, Inspector. I'm afraid I can't get hold of Sir Glenn just now. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I wanted a word with Mrs. Canning," the Scotland Yard man's vigorous tones came back. "I understand she's out. I take it she'll be available after dinner?"

"I expect so."

"Well, just tell her I'll drop round—at what time do you have dinner at Arkwood?"

"At half-past eight."

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"Say, half-past nine, then. And listen: I'd be glad if you'd indicate to the lady it's urgent. Tell her it's important I should see her to-night."

"Very good, Inspector. You wouldn't care to tell me what it's about?"

"It'll keep. Just say I'll be along. Good-bye!"

Rosemary and Eric Clayden in bath-wraps and slippers, were in the hall when I came from the telephone. A heavy black garment was spread out between them. It was a long cloak lined with red, with a high fall collar and a silver chain fastening at the throat—I knew at once it must be Miss Verge's Italian officer's cape. They both precipitated themselves upon me.

"That was Manderton, wasn't it?" Rosemary demanded.

I nodded.

"What's up now? What does he want with Elvira?" Clayden asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"You don't have to make any mystery about it," he went on. "We could hear him shouting all over the hall."

Suddenly Laura Verge bore down on us. "I thought I told you to leave my cape alone," she said to Clayden, taking the garment out of his hands.

"Rosemary says they found a button outside the park which old Toby swore must be off your cape. We merely wanted to see if it was," he answered. "Well, it is. Here, let me show you."

But Miss Verge whisked the cape firmly out of his reach. "Even so, I don't see what concern it is of yours," she retorted.

He gave her a brazen look. "I don't either—yet."

"Meaning what, exactly?"

He laughed drily. "Well, our friend from Scotland Yard appears to be developing an interest in Arkwood."

"I don't follow."

He jerked his head in my direction. "Ask *her*!" He turned to the Wreith girl. "Come on, Rosemary, let's go and swim!" They padded off.

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Miss Verge's sharp black eyes sought enlightenment from me. "Inspector Manderton's coming round after dinner to see Mrs. Canning," I explained.

Her face hardened. "Oh? What can he want with her?"

"He wouldn't tell me. But he said it was urgent."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Have you told her?"

"She's out, the butler said. The Inspector asked for Sir Glenn—he told me to take the call."

She slipped her arm into mine. "We'll go and find him."

When we came out on the terrace, the first person we saw was Mrs. Canning, standing there by Disford's chair, swinging her hat, cigarette in mouth. She turned at our approach. But our host snapped out to me: "Well, what did he want?"

"He's anxious to see Mrs. Canning—to-night. He says it's urgent. He'll be here after dinner—at half-past nine."

"What's it all about, did he say?"

"I asked him that, but he said it would keep."

Disford grunted, his face red and angry. He drew on his cigar. Mrs. Canning broke the silence.

"Well," she observed delicately, "that's that. I think I'll go and take a swim."

Her attitude puzzled me. It was curiously detached—you would have said that of all of us she was the least perturbed by the prospect of Manderton's impending visit. Sir Glenn made no attempt to detain her but only grunted again and poured himself another drink, while Miss Verge sat down composedly and, taking her knitting from her bag, became immediately absorbed. Then Disford returned to my type-written report and put on his glasses. He showed me a column of figures that he declared was misplaced. It was his fault, not mine, he said—would I mind retyping the page and leaving the report in his study? He was quite paternal, even jovial, about it; but his manner was hurried—I had the impression that they wanted to get rid of me.

So it was back to the cottage for me. In shirt and trousers, old Wace straddled a chair at the door, reading the evening paper.

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"What's this I hear about this Scotland Yard fellow wanting to see Mrs. Canning?" he growled, rolling his eyes at me. I told him of the Inspector's telephone call. "Humph!" He glared at me. "What's he dug up about her?"

I shook my head, laughing, as I sat down at the desk and slipped paper into my typewriter. "You make it sound very sinister, Mr. Wace."

"I've always said she was an adventuress. Now we'll find out. Where's Sir Glenn?"

"On the terrace with Miss Verge."

He stood up, picking up his coat and slipping into it, all in one motion, and shuffled off in the direction of the house.

It should not have taken me more than five minutes to re-type my page. But I had some trouble with the ribbon of my machine and it was a good quarter of an hour before I found myself crossing the terrace again on my way to Sir Glenn's study. There was no one on the terrace now and I made my way along it to the quadrangle and across the quadrangle to Disford's little self-contained wing without meeting anyone. I went in by the glass door and rapped on the study door at the end of the lobby. There was no answer, but it seemed to me that my ear caught a slight sound within, above the murmur of the fountain drifting in through the open window at my side. I therefore knocked again and, still receiving no response, turned the door-knob and walked in.

The room was empty. So sure was I that I had heard somebody there that I called out: "It's Miss Pell, Sir Glenn. May I come in?" thinking that, maybe, he had retired to his couch in the alcove, where I had seen him at our first meeting.

But there was no one in the alcove.

As I turned back, intending to lay my bundle of typing on the desk and leave it there, my eye fell on a small wall cupboard behind the desk chair. The cupboard door was ajar with the key, on a bunch hanging from it, in the lock. It was not the cupboard that attracted my attention. It

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was this bunch of keys. It was swaying gently to and fro. I knew then that my ears had not deceived me—there had been someone in the room when I had first knocked. I glanced back at the alcove. One of the french windows was half open—anyone could have gone out that way.

I went to the alcove window, pushed it wider, looked out. The smooth sward stretching away to the trees of the park was deserted. An angry growl behind me made me jump: "What do you want?"

It was Sir Glenn Disford. His face was flushed, he had divested himself of coat, collar and tie, and his hair glistened with water as though he had held his head under the tap.

I said: "I've retyped that page, as you asked."

He had sunk down heavily in the desk chair. "What's that?" he answered stupidly.

"I've finished that typing for you."

He nodded. "You can leave it." He pulled at the desk drawer in front of him and found it locked, then slapped his pockets. "Damn it, where are my keys?"

"Are those they in the cupboard behind you?"

He pivoted in his chair. "Give them to me, will you? You can lock the cupboard."

I obeyed and gave him the keys. He wriggled his shoulders. "Go on, beat it!" he bade me in a surly voice.

It was not much past seven o'clock and a whole hour to go before the dressing-gong. But I was in a restless mood and in no mind to face the rest of the party until dinner made it inevitable. So I slipped up the south stairs to my room, bolted the door and turned on the bath.

I was getting out of my clothes, under the serene gaze of my beautiful Lady Althea, when my eye fell upon the book on *Famous Shipwrecks* as it lay on the bedside table. Since I had read all I wanted to read in it, I bore it across to a chair beside the door to remind me to return it to the library on my way down to dinner. As I did so a scrap of paper dropped out. Retrieving it from the floor, I noticed that it was a long, irregular strip apparently torn from a

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tradesman's account—part of the printed heading survived—to serve as a book-mark.

I was about to crumple it up and drop it in the fireplace when I saw that a fragment of the customer's name, typed in at the top of the account, remained. I was able to distinguish a final “. . . ra” and, as part of the surname, a solitary “g.” So it was Elvira Canning who had borrowed *Famous Shipwrecks* from the library and she, presumably, who had brought it back and deposited it at the door, while Mr. Treadgold and I were inside. I felt puzzled, for I remembered that at the time she must have taken the book out I was the only person who knew of Danbury's association with the loss of the *Red Knight* and I had momentarily forgotten it. I could not believe that she had taken the book out at random—that would be too much of a coincidence: on the other hand, I was unable to picture her interested in famous disasters as a general subject.

It was very odd. I wondered what the explanation could be. Maybe old Treadgold could throw some light on it. I popped the slip of paper into my bag and went off to my bath.

Chapter Fifteen

I WAS a few minutes behind the second gong in reaching the lounge. As I glanced around I was glad to find I was not the last—Mrs. Canning had yet to appear. And then I noticed that Ronnie Barber was absent, too.

On the hearthrug Havilland faced Sir Glenn. Disford wore a fractious air. The butler was saying: “Madam's car hadn't been put away, Sir Glenn. It stood in the yard when Jennings went for his supper”—Jennings was the Arkwood chauffeur—“and when he came back, it was gone.”

I realized they were speaking of Mrs. Canning.

Clayden, now struck in: “She was down at the bathing-place before dinner. Rosemary and I left her there.”

“At what time was that?” Marcia demanded.

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"At about seven o'clock, I should say. Rosemary and I were back at the house by seven or a bit after."

"Did Elvira say anything about going out in her car, Eric?" Marcia asked.

"No. On the contrary, she knew Inspector What's-his-name was coming up to see her after dinner. I ragged her about it, and she didn't like it."

The butler spoke up: "Jennings told me, your ladyship, that Mr. Barber's car is out of order . . ."

"That's right"—Marcia turned to her husband. "The battery's run down—he was speaking about it at lunch."

"Jennings thinks," Havilland continued, "that if Mr. Barber wanted to run over to Maiden Shapley or somewhere, he might have got Mrs. Canning to drive him."

"But why should Mr. Barber want to go over to Shapley at the last moment before dinner, Havilland?" said Marcia.

There was a strident cackle from the background—I had not seen that old Wace was there. "If Elvira's driving," he said sarcastically, "they're probably folded round a telegraph-pole somewhere between this and Shapley. She's always charging into things."

"Tris, don't talk like that," said Marcia. "It's unlucky."

Disford grunted, plucking at his lip. "Well, I don't propose to wait for them. All right, Havilland, we'll go in."

In the lovely setting of Marcia Disford's white dining-room our little party slid imperceptibly back into the normal routine of the house, with the tall footmen—there were two of them—in their plum-coloured liveries gliding about with the dishes and Havilland, as stately as any cardinal, hovering in the background. We drank champagne: when Havilland came round with the hock, Sir Glenn waved him away and told him to open champagne. I could not help noticing the difference Elvira Canning's absence made. Our host for one, seemed a changed man. He was debonair, even gay, chaffing Clayden about his golf, listening to old Wace laying down the law about the position in the Mediterranean with amused tolerance, chatting amiably with his wife. For her birthday in September, he announced, he was going to give

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her a television-set and there was some argument about the different models. Under the influence of his mood Marcia Disford expanded and became quite talkative.

It was the pleasantest meal I had had at Arkwood. Yet, every now and then, like a skeleton at the feast, the portly figure of Inspector Manderton would come trampling into my mind.

Was Elvira Canning really an adventuress, as Tristram Wace proclaimed? If so, I wouldn't care to be in her shoes, with this loud-voiced, hectoring British cop after me.

Meanwhile, dinner proceeded and still no sign of her or Barber. Nothing further was said about them but, more than once, I caught Sir Glenn eyeing the Dresden china clock on the mantelsheff.

As we left the men to their cigars I heard him say to Havilland: "I'll see the Inspector in my study when he comes. You'd better leave some port there," and the butler's deferential: "Very good, Sir Glenn."

It was still light outside. The last plumes of the sunset flared in a sky barred with black and purple and on the terrace the bats went swooping. My coffee drunk, I strolled out as far as the balustrade and stood there, inhaling the dew-wet fragrance of the pergolas below. Then Sir Glenn's Sealyham came sniffing at my skirts. He was a friendly little dog and I was teasing him with my hanky when whom should I see but old Treadgold standing there, looking like an ambassador, with his iron-grey hair and well-fitting double-breasted dinner-coat.

"Hullo!" I said. "Where did you spring from?"

"I came over with Manderton," he replied. "He's with Sir Glenn."

I gazed at him with some perturbation. "Did Mrs. Canning get back yet?"

He shook his head. "No." His manner was rather grave. "Let's take a turn as far as the Prince Consort's Walk—I want to talk to you. How about a wrap?"

"No, thanks—I shan't be cold, the air's so warm. Besides, I have my scarf." We went down through the gardens to-

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gether, the Sealyham running in front, busily poking his nose into every flower-bed.

Seeing that I still limped a little, Mr. Treadgold gave me his arm—he had a nice companionable arm to cling to. The clipped hedges of the Prince Consort's Walk were black in the lurid light and under the solemn elms it was as dim and mysterious as the interior of one of those old continental cathedrals. We went as far as the little temple, shining whitely like a marabout's tomb in the gloom, and had turned to stroll back before my companion spoke.

"Are you quite sure that this man at the inn didn't mention Elvira Canning to you?" he demanded suddenly.

I stared at him in astonishment. "Elvira Canning? Mercy, no! Why should he?"

"He asked you if you were looking for someone, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Therefore, he was expecting a woman." His raised hand stayed me as I was about to interrupt with a question. "And what's more, not a village woman or a servant, but someone of your class."

"I suppose so. But I don't see . . ."

"Did you know that Mrs. Canning was also a survivor from the *Red Knight*?"

I stopped dead. "Who says so?"

"Manderton. That's what he wants to see her about. She was on board with her husband—they were entered in the passenger list under the name of Monk. He was drowned and she was saved."

"But it all happened so long ago—twenty years, isn't it? Are you sure there isn't some mistake?"

He shook his head. "Monk was an Englishman. She was British, too . . ."

"No?"

"As British as they come, a born Londoner!"

"She claimed to be an American . . ."

"She had probably lived in the States for a long time. They both had British passports. When you apply for a passport in this country you have to deposit a duplicate

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photograph with the Passport Office for their records. Well, when they were trying to trace Danbury, Scotland Yard got the local police a list of survivors and Superintendent Maggs, spotting the rather unusual Christian name of Elvira, applied for the duplicate photograph of Elvira Monk just on the chance. Pretty bright of him, wasn't it? Well, the photograph and also the photostat of her passport application came to-night. Place of application, London: date, July, 1919. Manderton showed them to me. It's our friend Elvira all right, and the description fits, too."

"But if a woman has been through a ghastly experience like that, wouldn't it become known . . . oh, I don't say to me, a stranger, but to her friends. I mean, wouldn't Rosemary or one of them, have said to me: 'Poor Elvira! You know she was in the wreck of . . .'"

He did not let me finish. "As far as I know, she never spoke of it to a soul. She didn't even mention it when it was disclosed that Danbury was a *Red Knight* survivor."

"Maybe it was one of those terrible things that happen to people, that they can never bring themselves to talk about."

He nodded. "Maybe. But you see her husband, this chap Monk . . ." He broke off, gazing along the dark grove. "What's the matter with Rumpus?"

I followed the direction of his eyes. Whining with eagerness, the Sealyham was snuffing furiously between two fallen tree-trunks that, lopped and trimmed, lay side by side at the edge of the path.

"He's only after a rabbit," I said. "What were you saying about Mrs. Canning's husband?"

"About Monk?—that he was a notorious jewel-thief—the Yard knows all about him." He checked again. "What *has* that dog got hold of?"

"Wait!" I said. "Do you remember the other night, when that book was missing from the library—the one about the famous wrecks? Well, I think I can tell you who had it. It was Elvira. I found part of a bill of hers in it as a book-mark."

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His cobalt eyes seemed to drill me through. "Ah!" he said.

"And she must have taken it out before anyone knew that Danbury was a survivor of the *Red Knight*. Because, if you remember, the name only came back to me when you and I were talking about *Alice Through the Looking Glass* in the library that night. Wait—I believe I have the slip of paper in my bag." I drew it out and gave it to him.

He examined it frostily. "I think I'll keep this, if you don't mind," he said, and thrust the torn fragment in his pocket.

I laid my hand on his arm. "What was there between Danbury and Elvira Canning? Does Manderton suggest that Danbury was mixed up in some crooked deal of her husband's, or what?"

He shook his head. "Manderton knows something but for the moment he's not telling. I fancy he hopes that Mrs. Canning will be able to throw some light on the subject"—he gave me a bleak look—"if we're not too late."

I clutched his wrist. "You mean—you mean you think she's lit out? That she won't face this Scotland Yard man?"

He shrugged his massive shoulders. "It's beginning to look like it, isn't it?"

A volley of barks brought us to the right-about. Frantic with excitement, Rumpus was tearing at something on the ground, something that showed vividly green upon the darker grass. We ran forward and Mr. Treadgold whipped the object away. It was a small, oblong package knotted in a jade-green chiffon handkerchief, stained with earth and torn by the dog's teeth. Loosely tied, the handkerchief fell away, letting a brown leather wallet, thin and battered, slide into Mr. Treadgold's hands.

He opened the wallet and fumbled in the pockets. The next thing I knew, he had put on his spectacles to examine a dirty tattered card. I saw the blue eyes snap.

"But this is Danbury's card as member of the Seamen's Union!" he exclaimed. He thrust the card at me. "See, his real name! Alfred Frederick Woodman!"

I found myself staring at an envelope whose dog-eared

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edge protruded from the wallet. I drew it forth and shook out the age-browned and ragged newspaper clipping it contained. Headlines danced before my eyes:

THE *Red Knight* DISASTER

SURVIVORS AT VIGO

STEWARD'S THRILLING NARRATIVE

CAPTAIN GOOCH'S HEROISM

"SAVE YOURSELF, MY MAN! MY PLACE IS HERE!"

I gazed inquiringly at my companion. He took the words out of my mouth. "It's Danbury's missing wallet!" he said with a puzzled air.

The wisp of green chiffon in which the wallet had been enveloped had fallen on the grass. I picked it up. Black lettering stood out upon the jade-green: I read "*Skol!*" and "*Pros't!*" and "*Santé!*" I held the handkerchief out to old Treadgold.

"It's Mrs. Canning's handkerchief. I recognize it by all the various drinking-toasts written on it. She had it with her at dinner last night."

My companion took the handkerchief from me, glanced at the writing on it, then raised it quickly to his nose, sniffing.

"Something's been spilt on it," he said, and sniffed again. On that he sniffed at the wallet, then put the handkerchief to his nose once more. "Wait a minute!" he said, and took another sniff. "I've got it—it's Kümmel!"

But I scarcely heard him. An appalling thought had invaded my mind. "Stop there!" I bade him. "Don't stir. I'll be right back."

I avoided the terrace but went in by the quadrangle entrance and rushed helter-skelter up the south-wing stairs to my room. There I opened my wardbore and thrust my hand in among my underwear in search of Elvira Canning's envelope which I had hidden there.

It was gone, and although I ransacked the shelf where I had concealed it, I failed to find it.

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Chapter Sixteen

WHEN I got back to the Prince Consort's Walk a light shone in the little temple. Mr. Treadgold was seated at the table in the centre, under a dim electric bulb, going through the wallet.

"This morning," I panted, breathless, "she gave me an envelope—a sealed envelope—to take care of for her."

His eyes glinted sternly through his glasses. "Mrs. Canning did?"

"Yes. It had something hard and heavy inside, something about the size of that wallet. I put it away in my wardrobe."

"Well?"

"It's gone!"

"Gone?" He frowned. "Who should have taken it?"

"I've no idea. She brought it to me this morning as I was working down at Mr. Wace's cottage. She seemed—well, scared. She implored me to take charge of it for her. She said she felt that nothing could happen to her as long as it was out of her possession."

Mr. Treadgold had returned the dead man's papers to the wallet. He laid the wallet in my hand. "Is that about the weight of the envelope she gave you?"

I weighed the shabby letter-case in my palm. "I can't say exactly, but I think so. It was something compact, anyway, like a packet of letters fastened together. That's what I thought it was, you know. It only occurred to me later or maybe, I wouldn't have taken charge of that envelope for her. You see, she told me she'd made up her mind to marry Sir Glenn. I was wondering whether perhaps these weren't his letters to her or something. She said that everybody was conspiring against her—Lady Disford, Rosemary, even poor Miss Verge. She was really scared."

My companion grunted and took the wallet from me. "Well, I'm not surprised. You realize, of course, what this means?" He dangled the wallet in his fingers. "It establishes

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a direct connection between Elvira Canning and this poor devil, Danbury. This cloaked figure you saw——”

I was aghast. “Oh, surely not!” I stopped short, as a torrent of suspicions flooded my mind.

If Eric Clayden were to be believed, she had been in the habit of borrowing the Italian cape, and then there was the button missing from it found at the park door. Furthermore, there was her inexplicable silence about the *Red Knight*, even after it was common knowledge that Danbury was, like her, a survivor and, lastly, here was the dead man’s missing wallet turning up, wrapped in her handkerchief.

“We must face facts,” the level voice went on. “The assumption is strong that whoever killed Danbury took his wallet, and now we know why. It was because it contained evidence of the fact that Danbury was a survivor of the *Red Knight*—in other words, the murderer was out to cover up the hidden link between them, namely, the shipwreck.”

“But you’re suggesting that Mrs. Canning killed this man!”

He gave an indifferent shrug. “I confess I shall be vastly interested in any proof she can bring to the contrary.”

The Sealyham was jumping up at me, trying to catch with his teeth the green chiffon handkerchief I held in my hand. “Down, Rumpus!” I said.

Mr. Treadgold was staring at the dog. Then he took the handkerchief from me and once more raised it to his nose. “It certainly reeks of kümmel,” he observed, and handed it to me. “Here, smell it!”

I lifted the scrap of chiffon to my nose. The odour of kümmel was strong.

“Well,” said my companion, “Manderton will have to have this. We’d better go up to the house.”

“I wonder if Mrs. Canning is back . . .”

“I wonder.” His regard, benign but inscrutable, met mine; and I knew that the thought in my mind was in his also. With that he switched off the light in the temple and we set off for the house.

The windows of the lounge streamed light upon the terrace.

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The whole house-party appeared to be assembled there in the open air, but the first person my eyes lighted on was Inspector Manderton. He stood with Sir Glenn, facing Ronnie Barber, who was still in pullover and slacks, as though he had just got in. Barber was saying to Disford: "My dear Glenn, I haven't the faintest idea. I haven't seen her since before dinner."

"Then she didn't go out with you?"

"No. I left her down at the lake."

"But you had her car?"

"Yes. Mine's out of action. I had to go over to Maiden Shapley rather urgently, so I borrowed it. I knew she wouldn't need it, as she was bathing."

Our host turned to the Scotland Yard man. "This beats me. We all made sure she'd gone off somewhere in her car with Mr. Barber here. I can't imagine what's become of her."

The Scotland Yard man addressed Barber. "You say you saw the lady last before dinner. At what time would this have been?"

"Round about half-past seven."

"Down at the lake—she was bathing, I think you said?"

"That's right."

"You were bathing, too?"

"No. I just stood there and chatted with her for a bit."

"Was there anyone else there?"

"No. Only the two of us."

"And when you came away, she was dressing, or what?"

"She was still in the water."

"At what time was this?"

"At seven-thirty or a little after. I was only with her for about five minutes."

The Inspector cleared his throat. "Did she say anything about my wanting to see her after dinner?"

Barber made an almost imperceptible pause. "She did mention it, I believe."

"Did she seem—well, alarmed or fussed?"

Once more a brief hesitation. "No-o. She wondered what you wanted with her, that was all."

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Mr. Treadgold stepped forward then, wallet in hand.

"You ought to see this," he said, giving Manderton the letter-case. "It's Danbury's missing wallet—you'll find there his union card and a cutting about his rescue from the wreck of the *Red Knight*. The dog turned it up just now, hidden in the Prince Consort's Walk, wrapped in this handkerchief . . ." He held out the wisp of green chiffon.

Laura Verge spoke up. "But that's Elvira's handkerchief." She lifted a corner as it drooped from old Treadgold's hand. "Marcy—Rosemary—you remember it, with toasts written all over it?"

Manderton took the handkerchief with a quick scowl.

"Mrs. Canning's, eh?" he murmured, glanced at it, then laid it on a table beside him.

Disford seemed dumbfounded, staring blankly at the wallet.

The Scotland Yard man picked up the wallet, glanced briefly through its contents. Then he said to Disford: "We've got to find the lady without loss of time, sir. In the first place, I'd like to ascertain whether she has taken any of her clothes away."

Sir Glenn was like a man stunned. His face was scarlet and he kept mopping his brow. It was Marcia who came to the Inspector's aid.

"Rosemary," she said, "would you mind? It's Edith who looks after her, isn't it? She should be able to tell you whether any of her things are missing."

But it was Laura who went. With a face adamant, Manderton moved nearer the lounge lights, and resumed his examination of the wallet, completely indifferent to our presence. A protracted silence, horribly poignant, followed. As my eyes travelled round the circle, I particularly noticed Ronnie Barber. He had not moved but stood there like a statue, his mobile features knit in a perplexed and troubled expression. Then suddenly the butler was in our midst. His manner was rather agitated.

"Excuse me, Sir Glenn," he said, addressing Disford, "but I took the liberty, sir, of sending Charles as far as the lake, to see was there any sign of Mrs. Canning . . ."

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It was Inspector Manderton who answered: "Well, well, my man, what did he find?"

Havilland turned about and one of the tall footmen came forward with an important air. A large beach-bag of the brightest blue which he was carrying made an incongruous patch of colour against his sober livery. I recognized the bag at once—I had last seen it on Elvira Canning's arm when she had called on me at the cottage that morning.

"Well, Charles?" Sir Glenn encouraged him.

Marcia Disford interposed: "But that's Elvira's bag. Where did you find it, Charles?"

"It was lying on the dock, your ladyship, close to the water, along with madam's cigarette-case and dark glasses—I put them in the bag." He cleared his throat. "I thought I'd take a look in the bath-house and—well, her things are still hanging there—those blue pyjamas and striped vest that madam sometimes wears: one of the maids saw her going towards the lake in them with her bag and towel, soon after half-past six this evening. And there aren't but two soots hanging up to dry—Miss Rosemary's and Mr. Clayden's, I reckon—when there should be three, that is allowing that madam came out of the water."

Manderton's voice broke in: "Damn it, my man, what are you trying to say?"

The footman assumed a stolid expression. "I was thinking, maybe we ought to drag the lake."

"God!"

The oath slipped quiet as a sigh from the Inspector's lips. "Could she swim?" he demanded of us all collectively. Disford shook his head.

Havilland had gone very pale. "There's 'oles in the lake," he said, dropping ~~an~~ aitch in his agitation, "some very bad 'oles in the deep part beyond the dock. One of the gardener's boys got drowned in his late Lordship's time—the weeds took him."

Marcia Disford gazed wide-eyed at her husband.

"Glenn, it isn't possible?" she murmured.

At the same moment Laura came bustling from the house.

"Well," she announced, "wherever Elvira's gone she

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evidently intends to come back. She's taken nothing, not even her bag with her money. She hasn't been in to dress, for her evening things are still laid out on the bed: the only things missing are the clothes she has on—her matelot vest and 'pyjams' she changed into when she went down to bathe, Edith says . . ."

Manderton swung almost fiercely to Disford.

"Any electricity down there at this bathing-place of yours?" he demanded.

Sir Glenn seemed past speech. It was Laura Verge who came to his rescue. "No, Inspector. It's not used after dark," she said.

"Is there a boat?"

"Yes. But whether it's water-tight . . ."

"We shall want lights. Maybe we could run my car as far as the lake and use the headlamps. Come with me, please, Sir Glenn: I shall need someone to show me the way."

He went storming into the house then. I stood rooted to the spot. I was dimly aware of Rosemary speaking to me, but I paid no heed to what she was saying. I felt I knew now who had stabbed my little man at the inn; guessed, too, that we should never hear the whole story lying, as it surely must, at the bottom of the Arkwood lake with the ill-fated Elvira.

Chapter Seventeen

THE Inspector's departure seemed to lift a ban. Our host, the faithful Verge trailing behind, went with him, but the moment the trio had disappeared into the lounge, the rest of the party burst into excited conversation. Then, suddenly, as it seemed to me, the terrace was deserted—with one accord, as though fearful of the dark, they were all drifting towards the lighted lounge. They had forgotten me. I did not mind—the matter of the wallet was on my conscience. Mr. Treadgold, I remembered gratefully, had not disclosed my part in it; but I realized it was inevitably bound

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to come out. Then I looked up and saw him standing at the balustrade, gazing at me thoughtfully through a little eddy of smoke from his pipe.

I ran to him: he gave me an immense sense of confidence, he was so massive, so calm, so kindly.

"You were right," I cried. "It *was* she I saw in the cloak. This—this proves it, doesn't it? The poor, poor thing." And—well, I just couldn't help it—I burst into tears. I rested my elbows on the edge of the balustrade and wept bitterly into the hydrangeas.

He didn't try to give me any of that "Now, now, control yourself!" or "Little woman!" stuff, or fuss over me, and I liked him for that, too. He just said in a sad sort of voice: "'Poor thing' is right," and went on puffing at his pipe. But presently he touched my elbow and there was a large white handkerchief. I took it and blew my nose. "Thanks," I snuffled. Then he slipped his arm in mine.

"Chin up, little Clarissa!" he said. "Because it looks as if you and I were destined to be in this together. After all, it was I who was responsible for bringing you here." Then he raised his head and turned to look out across the gardens at the dark park whence the noise of a car, shattering the silence of the night, resounded. There were lights in the sky. "Manderton! He's started for the lake," he announced. "Do you want to come down there with me?"

I dried my eyes and gave him back his hanky. "All right!"

They had brought two cars to the head of the lake, one of them a station wagon. Their headlights cut a broad swathe in the darkness, revealing a reed-edged sheet of water curving away in a sickle of black glass to melt imperceptibly into the dense woods that descended to its banks. Moths danced in the beam and out on the water the night mist clung in a fleecy curtain. The surrounding darkness was astir with the little noises of the summer night—the rhythmic croak of frogs, the squawk of a night bird, queer wobbly cries that I knew to be cranes.

The cars were deserted with their lights full on. Here on

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one side the reeds had been cleared to make room for a little dock, back of which was the bath-house, a small, buff-coloured building, on one floor, with a crenellated façade. Everything was as light as day. On the dock, on the far side of the springboard, we could see Jennings, the Arkwood chauffeur, and the two footmen in their elegant livery casting off a punt moored there, while Manderton and Sir Glenn looked on. Apart, in a little frightened group at one end of the dock, the rest of the house-party contemplated the scene in silence. We moved towards the dock, our feet noiseless on the grass, but on reaching it my companion guided me round the back of the bath-house so that we emerged at the far end of the landing-stage, away from the others.

The open bath-house doors displayed to view a small lounge with basket-chairs, a table of magazines and a bar in the corner. Rooms opened off on either side—the dressing-rooms, presumably. Rubber mattresses and rubber horses lay on the dock. One of the mattresses had been drawn close to the water's edge, beside the springboard, and here on the planks I perceived a crumpled towel, a copy of the *Daily Mirror*, an empty cocktail glass, some cigarette stubs stained with lipstick.

One of the footmen had been baling out the boat. Then Manderton and Disford stepped in and the chauffeur, using an oar as a pole, pushed off. The punt slid out in the bright glare. They had two flaring acetylene lamps in the bows which threw an incandescent beam ahead. One by one the rest of the party had crept out on to the dock until we stood in a long line, silently following the punt's stealthy progress.

Suddenly there was a shrill scream. I swung about and saw Lady Disford, her hand raised, pointing past us at the reeds where the dock ended. "God!" she cried. "Look there!"

Not six yards from where Mr. Treadgold and I were standing at the end of the little platform, a couple of wooden steps led down to the bank of the lake where the bulrushes grew thickly. Swaying to the ripple imparted by the moving boat, the rushes had parted, disclosing a patch of vivid green. One glance told us the truth: it was Elvira Canning in a black

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rubber cap and grass-green swimming suit slumped there, face downwards in the sedge.

Someone shouted at the boat, but Mr. Treadgold did not wait. Even as he sprang towards the spot, however, a figure flashed by him. It was Ronnie Barber. He was down the steps and waist-deep in the reeds in a second. With the water up to his middle, he got his arms under the limp form and, raising it up, lifted it towards the bank where Treadgold and old Wace received it. I was just behind them, with Laura Verge and Clayden.

They laid her down there on the mossy bank, bathed in the radiance of the headlights. I had never seen a drowned person before: I had to steel myself to look. My blood seemed to congeal at the sight of her. They say that death by drowning is merciful; but the expression of agony on the dead woman's features was terrible, with glazed eyes wide open and lips parted. Beneath her make-up, her complexion had a blueish tinge.

Mr. Treadgold had dropped to his knees and was staring down into her face. Then he stooped forward to her mouth, bending so close that for an instant the preposterous thought crossed my mind that he was going to kiss her. But instead I heard him sniff, quite audibly twice. On that, very slowly, he straightened up and still staring down at her, rose to his feet, his air stern and grim. At the same moment, just behind me, the boat drove through the rushes and Manderton sprang out on the bank.

At the sight of the dead woman lying there at his feet, he turned and, snatching up one of the acetylene flares from the boat, held it up so that the light fell on the distorted features. For an instant his eye rolled irascibly round the scared faces about him.

"Go back to the house at once, please, everybody!" he ordered. With that, he put the flare down and dropped to his knee beside the body. The last I saw of him as, with the others, I backed away along the dock, he was silhouetted there against the guttering flame, a massive, black figure, purposeful, menacing.

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At the sound of our feet on the hollow planking, Rosemary came to the bath-house door. "Marcia fainted," she said with a backward movement of the head. "She doesn't seem to come round—it's frightening." Her glance ran from one to the other of us as we stood there. "It's Elvira, isn't it?" she questioned.

"She drowned herself," Clayden answered. "It's too ghastly." His voice had a hysterical ring.

At that moment our host emerged from the obscurity of the lounge. The perspiration ran down his cheeks and his collar was a wreck; his heavy face glistened whitely in the glare of the automobile lights. "She's coming round," he told Rosemary. "We must get her up to the house—maybe the station wagon..." Then his eye sought out Laura Verge. She stepped forward quickly and laid her hand on his sleeve.

"She wouldn't face the Inspector, Glenn," she said.

He nodded. "Maybe it was the best solution. Now I fear we shall never know what there was between her and this fellow at the inn."

"Unless the Inspector makes it his business to find out." It was Ronnie Barber who had spoken. There was so much feeling in his voice that I turned in surprise and saw him standing there in his sopping clothes, his dark face set in bitter lines. But then Lady Disford appeared on her sister's arm and Sir Glenn sprang forward to assist her.

"It's all right, really," Marcia was saying. "I can walk as far as the house, honestly I can." But then she staggered and would have fallen if her husband had not caught her. He raised her in his arms and carried her off to the waiting cars.

The others had moved forward towards the lawn. I was about to follow, when Barber stepped in front of me. His expression frightened me—he had a haunted look.

"A nice kind of damn fool you are!" he said through clenched teeth. "I told you to clear out, didn't I? Why the Hades couldn't you have taken my advice?"

Without waiting for an answer, he turned on his heel and strode off along the dock towards where figures moved against the glare. Left alone, I hobbled off after the others.

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Chapter Eighteen

I CAN skip the next couple of hours and go on at the point where we found ourselves in the lounge facing Inspector Manderton who, solid as a tower, was erect in front of the piano. We were all there except Lady Disford—Rosemary slipped in at the last moment rather pale and tense. "She's all right," she whispered as she dropped into the settee beside me. "Dr. Hammond has just gone."

The scene struck me as being preposterously unreal—the long room with its shaded lights and bridge-tables set ready, the men's white shirt-fronts, our evening frocks, suggested a peaceable evening's bridge. That massive figure in blue serge was the only discordant note, for Superintendent Maggs' uniform was swallowed up in the shadow and Major Hendersley, who had come with them, was in evening dress. Mr. Treadgold sat apart, nursing his knee in his clasped hands and contemplating the ceiling.

The Inspector sprang his first surprise right away. "I won't waste words for the moment on what happened to-night," he began. "What I'm out to establish first of all is what exactly lies behind it. I understand that Mrs. Canning never mentioned to any of you the fact that she was a survivor of the *Red Knight* disaster?"

Before the rustle of surprise which this announcement caused had died away, Laura Verge struck in: "As I've told you, Inspector, she never breathed a word about it."

"Not even when it became known that this man killed at the inn was also a survivor?" Manderton insisted.

"There surely must be some mistake," said Miss Verge firmly. "I mean, if she didn't speak of it before, she'd have said something when there was all the talk about this wretched man having been saved from the *Red Knight*."

"There's no mistake about it," Manderton cut her off. He turned to our host. "I can now disclose to you, Sir Glenn, certain facts which I had intended to reveal only in the

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presence of the lady herself. She has been definitely identified by her passport photograph and general description, as a woman who was a passenger on board the *Red Knight* with her husband, an Englishman who registered under the name of Monk. They were entered in the passenger list as Mr. and Mrs. Randolph Monk, and her passport was made out in the name of Elvira Monk."

"You mean to say she wasn't called Canning at all?" someone exclaimed.

"Canning was her maiden name," the Scotland Yard man went on. "And the husband's real name was not Monk, but Galbraith—but I'm coming to that. When the *Red Knight* went down, like most of these liners coming from the Cape, she was carrying a large consignment of gold: that's why, for the past two years, a Dutch salvage firm has been trying to raise her—actually, I understand they've managed to recover nearly half a million pounds' worth of gold already. In addition to the gold, however, which is kept in a special strongroom below decks on these ships, it was known that there was a lot of valuable stuff in the purser's safe deposited for safe keeping by passengers—not only personal jewellery, for there was a wealthy crowd on board, millionaires and their wives and such, but also diamonds, uncut stones."

He paused then and let his dark eyes rove slowly round. Everybody was on edge with suspense—you could have heard a pin drop. I realized that we were seeing the Scotland Yard man from a new angle. His personality dominated as always, but in manner, even in voice, he appeared to be suaver than I had seen him before, as though the night's tragedy had humanized him.

"Last summer," he went on, "by cutting down through four decks the salvage company succeeded in bringing up the purser's safe. But when the barnacles and stuff had been removed, it was discovered that the safe was unlocked and empty. Now the purser of the *Red Knight*, who normally kept the keys of the safe, was among the missing and at first it was assumed that he had packed up the contents of the safe before taking to the boats and that the valuables

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were lost with him. The salvage company's inquiries, however, elicited a curious story."

It was evident that the Inspector did not disdain to be dramatic on occasion. The pause he now made would have done credit to the finest actor.

"It seems that in nineteen twenty-one or thereabouts, that is to say, some two years after the wreck," he resumed, "a certain Johannesburg diamond dealer, who had lost a consignment of stones in the *Red Knight*, claimed to have recognized some of them in a parcel of diamonds offered for sale at Antwerp. The insurance people, who had long since settled all claims, put their assessors on to the case, and I believe discreet inquiries were made with a view to discovering whether the *Red Knight* purser, a man named Anderson, Ronald Anderson, might not have survived the wreck after all and absconded with the valuables in the safe. I believe the assessors actually got into touch with Anderson's widow, but without finding a scrap of evidence to show that Anderson was still alive and as the diamond dealer's story was not very convincing—he was not a particularly reputable person, it appears—and he had, in any case, been paid out by the insurance company, the matter was allowed to drop."

He paused again and let his eye rove challengingly round the attentive circle of listeners.

"The Knight Line," he continued, "particularly in the person of their chairman, Lord Clanannan, were extremely indignant at the aspersions cast upon their purser who, they pointed out, was a man of unblemished reputation and one of their most trusted employees. Now, at the instigation of the salvage company, on the recovery of the empty safe, they began to inquire into the antecedents of the passengers and ship's company of the *Red Knight*. These inquiries, I gather, did not take them very far but they did, at least, throw light on one interesting fact, and that was the true identity of Randolph Monk, husband of the lady you all knew as Elvira Canning."

He broke off to blow his nose on a red bandanna hand-

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kerchief—it was like the trumpeting of an elephant in the hushed room.

"Monk," he said, "was drowned in the wreck. His body was one of the few recovered and, in the absence of his wife, who was landed with the other survivors at Vigo, was interred with a few others in some little churchyard on the islands where it was washed up. That, I may say, has been definitely established. In the course of their investigations the Knight Line elicited the fact that Monk was an assumed name and that Randolph Monk was none other than the notorious 'Brig' Galbraith, known to both the South African and American police as a daring and successful jewel thief."

It was the second sensation the Inspector had drawn from the hat and he made the most of it. A restless stir swept the lounge. Laura Verge's voice cut in upon the incredulous silence. "A jewel thief?" and our host echoed blankly, "A jewel thief?"

"Yes, Sir Glenn," said Manderton in a loud tone, "and one of the flyest operators of his time. The Knight Line stand by their purser, but the fact remains, if this Johannesburg diamond dealer's story goes for anything, that someone got away from the *Red Knight* with at least one parcel of stones—and it wasn't Brig Galbraith. The natural inference is that Galbraith robbed the safe and that his wife, the woman known to you as Elvira Canning, carried off the swag. But against this is the fact that the safe, when brought up, was empty with the lock unforced, showing that it had been opened with the key. But the only key was in Anderson's possession and the Line insist strenuously that he wouldn't have parted with it to anyone. Furthermore, they claim that the safe is of the highest quality and couldn't have been opened by touch or any process except blowing. As the safe is unharmed this appears to rule Galbraith out, as a professional safe-cracker, at any rate, though not as a possible accomplice of Anderson, if the two of them were in it together."

He checked for a moment as though to marshal his thoughts, staring down at the carpet.

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"What appears to favour this theory of collusion if not with the purser then at least with his staff," he went on presently, "is the fact that Danbury, as I have now ascertained, was purser's steward on board the *Red Knight*, that's to say, he was Anderson's personal servant and, as such, presumably had the run of the purser's office where the safe stood. Whatever took place that night when the *Red Knight* was being battered to pieces on the reef, it's pretty evident that Danbury knew all about it, knew, too, that Mrs. Canning was in it and tracked her down to Arkwood in order to blackmail her. He appeared to be expecting a woman and he told Miss Pell that a better time was coming for him, or words to that effect."

Wace's strident voice from across the room shattered the ensuing silence as the Inspector paused in his narrative. "And to stop his mouth, she killed him?" he croaked.

The Scotland Yard man shrugged his shoulders.

"The lady's action to-night certainly supports that inference," he said coldly. "Unfortunately, when I telephoned, the whole of the facts I've related were not in my possession, especially the real identity of Monk, or I shouldn't have delayed a minute." He cleared his throat resonantly. "We now come back to the night of the affair at the Sedgwick Arms. What I'm anxious to ascertain at present is whether any of you can throw any light on the lady's movements on the evening in question—let's see, it'd be last Tuesday."

It was, characteristically, Laura Verge who was the first to shake off the paralysis of dismay that overlay us all.

"That was the night it rained so terribly," she said in her cool, brisk voice. "As far as I remember, we broke up early, everything was so damp and depressing."

"I know," Manderton agreed. "I've spoken to the maid who waited on Mrs. Canning. She says that the ladies came up to bed before eleven. She remembers, because Mrs. Canning rang and asked for her hot water bottle to be filled. As for the men"—he glanced at a slip of paper in his hand—"you'll correct me if I'm wrong, Sir Glenn—you yourself went to your study soon after dinner and worked until around

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midnight, when you went up to bed: Mr. Barber and Mr. Clayden were playing snooker in the billiard-room until near midnight when they likewise retired while, as for Mr. Wace, he went off to his cottage when the ladies said good night, around eleven. Right? According to the landlord, Woodman—or Danbury—was killed around half-past one: what I want to know is, did anyone see Mrs. Canning leave the house, or even her room, later on, say around one o'clock?"

No one spoke. There was a pause. Laura Verge broke it.

"All I can tell you," she remarked gruffly, "is that someone borrowed my cape that night from the coat-room at the foot of the south wing stairs—I know, because I found it sopping wet next morning."

The detective seemed to check. He said nothing, however, but again consulted his paper.

"Let's see," he remarked presently, "Mrs. Canning slept in that wing, didn't she?"

"Yes, on the first floor, just at the head of the south wing stairs."

"And you think it was she who borrowed your cape?"

Miss Verge shrugged her shoulders. "If she didn't, I'd like to know who did."

With a glance at our host, Eric Clayden spoke up.

"Maybe Sir Glenn can tell you."

I saw Disford's eyes flash uneasily. "Now hold hard there, Eric . . ." he began.

Clayden was pale with excitement. "I've seen Elvira leaving your ground-floor suite in the middle of the night, wearing that cloak of Laura's. You won't deny it, I suppose?"

Disford glowered. "Just a minute now, Eric!"

But Clayden stood his ground. "Do you deny it?"

"Quiet, please!" Manderton intervened with a bang—his voice was like the clang of iron on iron. His stern glance swung to Clayden. "Let's get this straight, sir. You say you saw the deceased dressed in Miss Verge's cape leaving Sir Glenn's suite in the middle of the night. On Tuesday, on the night of the murder, was it?"

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"It was on Sunday—the previous Sunday—as a matter of fact," Clayden conceded ungraciously. "But what I'm trying to point out . . ."

"A moment, sir, if you please!" barked the Inspector, and turned to our host, who was trying to speak. "Yes, Sir Glenn?"

"I was about to say"—Disford's air was sulky—"that, as far as I remember, Mrs. Canning and I did sit up late in my study one night—if Clayden says it was Sunday I dare say it was. I sometimes advised her about her investments. On this particular occasion I'd been playing golf all day: as she was in a hurry to instruct her broker, we sat down in my study for a regular session, after the others had gone to bed."

"And she was wearing Miss Verge's cape?"

"She may have been—I can't really say."

"I mean—she was living in the house, wasn't she? She didn't have to come from outside?"

Sir Glenn emitted a sort of growl. "I don't know what she was wearing. She came to my study and when we were through with our talk, she left again. If it was raining she might well have borrowed Miss Verge's cape to come across the quadrangle from the other wing—it's shorter than going through the house."

"And also more private," Clayden struck in. Then his nerve seemed to snap. "The Inspector wants the truth, so why don't you give him the truth?" he cried hysterically. "Why not own up like a man that you invited this woman of yours to your house, thrust her down the throat of your wife and your guests . . ."

But now Laura Verge sprang up. "Eric, have you taken leave of your senses?" And to Disford, who had scrambled to his feet: "No, please, G.D.—I'll deal with this!"

In a sort of wailing voice Clayden exclaimed: "Did you see her eyes as she lay there on the bank? Oh; God—it's too ghastly!" His voice broke and, burying his face in his hands, he began to sob.

It was a horribly embarrassing moment. Manderton stood as though carved out of stone, his expression perfectly inscrutable.

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Barber was the first to react. He had changed his wet garments for a dry suit by this time, and striding across to where Clayden sat slewed round in his chair, his face resting on his arm stretched along the back, Barber shook Eric roughly by the shoulder.

"Pull yourself together, man, or get out!" he bade him in a stern voice.

With an unwilling movement Clayden threw him off.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, "but it's all so foul, so—so pitiful!" So saying, he jumped up and, turning his back on us all, went and stood at the window.

I will say that for Sir Glenn—he made no attempt to defend himself. He sat down abruptly, breathing hard, and with a somewhat unsteady hand proceeded to re-light his cigar.

Manderton said composedly: "We now come to the events of to-night. The first thing I wish to establish is who actually was the last to see the deceased alive." His glance shifted to Ronnie Barber. "By my reckoning, it must have been you, Mr. Barber. You told me you were down at the lake with her at half-past seven. Right? Did any of you see her later?"

There was a silence then. Laura Verge broke it.

"Miss Pell told Sir Glenn in Mrs. Canning's presence about half-past six that you were coming up to see her after dinner," she said. "If she were alarmed, she didn't show it—that's so, isn't it, Clarissa? At any rate, she went off very calmly to swim. At that time Miss Wreith and Mr. Clayden were already down at the bathing-place: soon after Sir Glenn went round the home-farm with the bailiff and returned only in time to dress for dinner: Lady Disford—where was Marcia, Rosemary?"

"She was in the morning-room, going through the weekly accounts," Rosemary replied. "From there she went straight up to dress."

"I didn't see Mrs. Canning again after she left us to go swimming," Miss Verge resumed, "and I don't think any of us did, except Miss Wreith and Mr. Clayden—and, of course, Mr. Barber, later. Unless Miss Pell or Mr. Wace . . ."

I explained that I had been down at the cottage re-typing Sir Glenn's pages and that I had found Mr. Wace there.

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"That's right," said Wace, with gnarled face writhing. "I went up to the house soon after to find Sir Glenn. But he was off round the farm, so I went back to my cottage to change. But maybe the servants . . ."

"I've spoken to the servants," the Inspector rejoined. "One of the maids caught sight of Mrs. Canning headed for the lake in her pyjama suit just before seven o'clock, but that was the last seen of her." He looked towards Barber. "It looks like you were the last person to talk to her alive, sir. You told me you were down at the lake around half-past seven, didn't you?"

Barber nodded. "That's right."

"What was she doing?"

"Just paddling about in the water."

"And you had a bit of a chat?"

"Uh-huh."

"How did she seem?"

"I told you—all right."

"She knew I wanted to see her after dinner?"

"Oh, yes."

"Who told her—did she say?"

"She said she was with Sir Glenn when Miss Pell brought him your message."

"Did she give any indication of knowing why I wanted to see her?"

He shook his head. "I've told you already—no."

"Just what did she say?"

"Nothing much—I don't remember."

"I should be obliged if you'd make the effort, sir. It might be important."

"I've told you once"—his tone rose. "She wondered what you wanted with her."

The detective remained imperturbable. "Was that all?"

"I think so. We didn't have much conversation about it, really. The first thing she wanted when I came down to the lake was a cocktail, and I went to the bar to mix it."

I glanced at the Scotland Yard man apprehensively: it seemed to me that he must perceive, as I did, that Barber

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was covering up, so strongly did his vague, almost evasive air contrast with his usual vigorous and incisive manner. Remembering the attempt he had made to get me to leave Arkwood, I did not for a moment believe that he was not wise to Elvira Canning's past: on the contrary, it seemed to me very probable that he had gone down to the lake to warn her that Manderton was on her track. Nevertheless, it was evident that her suicide had shocked him profoundly. There was not much colour in his cheeks at any time, but now his hue was ghastly, and I had the impression that he was making a considerable effort to control himself.

Barber's reply appeared to interest the detective considerably. "I see," he said. "So you mixed her a cocktail? What sort of a cocktail?"

"A dry Martini."

"Did you have one, too?"

"Yes."

"Where? In that little lounge-place where there's a bar?"

"No. On the edge of the dock. Mrs. Canning was in the water so I brought the drinks out to her there."

"And you drank yours there beside the water?"

"I did."

"And Mrs. Canning?"

"She was splashing about in the lake. I put her drink down at the edge of the dock with her bag and things."

"Did you see her drink it?"

"I can't say I did. We chatted for a bit, then I had to leave her as I was obliged to go to Maiden Shapley."

"Leaving her in the water? With her drink handy, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"It was a sort of barrel-shaped glass, was it?"

The young man uttered an exasperated sigh. "I really don't remember."

"There was a glass of that description on the side of the dock . . ."

"If it was on the dock it was probably hers."

"What did you do with the shaker?"

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"I left it indoors on the table, I expect."

"How much was in it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I can't really say. Enough for another drink, at any rate."

The Inspector nodded. "That's right. The shaker was where you left it, anyhow, with a couple of glassfuls in it—the ice would account for that." The hard eyes dwelt inquiringly on Barber. "You didn't happen to see whether Mrs. Canning had anything like a phial or a small bottle with her?"

Barber hesitated. "A phial?" he echoed.

"A phial, sir. You see there are clear indications of poison."

Like the night wind that stirred the curtains at the french windows, a great gasp went shuddering through the room. Disford spoke in a strangled voice:

"Poison?"

Manderton stuck out his lip. "She wanted to make sure, I guess. Looks to me like she put the stuff in that drink of hers, and tossed it off standing in the water, and the reeds prevented the body from sinking." His manner grew brisker. "We've got to find out where she got the stuff and what she did with the bottle, if it means draining the lake, Sir Glenn. She probably threw the phial or whatever it was away as she drank. Potassium cyanide—prussic acid, as some call it—acts absolutely instantaneously, you know, if it's in strong enough solution." He wagged his head shrewdly. "I'm waiting for the doctor's report but, believe me, I wouldn't be mistaken in a thing like this. The odour of bitter almonds is characteristic and it still clings to her lips even after several hours' immersion and to the cocktail glass as well." He paused and glanced swiftly round. "The point is, where did she get it?"

There was a paralysing silence. Then a raucous voice piped up. "Are you going to tell him, Glenn, or shall I?" It was Wace.

Disford did not appear to hear him, staring in front of him, his face the colour of putty.

"What about that cyanide, you used to kill old Duck?" Wace croaked.

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Manderton leaned forward. "Do I understand that you had cyanide in your possession, sir?"

Sir Glenn nodded. "I'd forgotten," he said, wiping his lips with his handkerchief. "I got it some months back to put an old retriever out of its misery."

"Where do you keep it?"

"In a locked cupboard in my study."

"Show me, please."

Like a charging bull, the Inspector made for the door, Superintendent Maggs at his heels. The Chief Constable followed more sedately with Disford, and Laura Verge went with them. A clamour of frightened voices broke out about me, but I paid no heed. My mind was groping backwards to a scene of tiny tombstones gleaming whitely against the green sward in the dusk—mechanically my eyes sought out Ronnie Barber, as the recollection came back to me of the anecdote he had related to me at the dogs' cemetery by the Prince Consort's Walk, of how he had seen Disford with the tears running down his face feeding cyanide to a beloved old dog. Disford said he had forgotten about the cyanide. But Ronnie must surely have recalled the incident he had described to me so dramatically. Why, then, had he waited for Wace to reveal the existence of this stock of cyanide in our host's possession?

He was staring at the door through which Manderton and our host had disappeared. But my fixed scrutiny seemed to draw his gaze, for he half turned round in his chair and our eyes met.

Once again I was conscious of his hunted expression—there was an unspoken appeal in his glance as though he could read my thoughts and was pleading with me to keep them to myself. As I looked at him, another little picture sharpened into focus in my mind. It was a bunch of keys swinging gently in a lock: and I saw again the white walls of Sir Glenn's pleasant study and the cupboard door ajar behind his desk, as they had met my gaze when I had brought the typing to his room before dinner that evening. As I knocked I thought I had heard a movement within the room: it must

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have been Elvira in search of the poison which was to enable her, as Manderton said, "to make sure." But then why had Barber held his peace when Manderton asked about the cyanide and why, above all, were his dark eyes fixed on mine in such a despairing expression of appeal?

Chapter Nineteen

IN a moment his eyes fell away from mine; but I continued to look at him. Once more I realized that I was definitely interested in this young man, indeed, that I had been interested in him from our very first meeting on board the *Queen Mary*. I had had fugitive fancies for a succession of boys in my time, and there was one serious interlude when a man in Boyle and Skrimshire's had wanted to marry me, but a wife and two children, whom he had kept in the background, put an end to the romance.

I found Ronnie Barber bossy and irritating, and, as it seemed to me, quite unnecessarily mysterious. But of all the people at Arkwood, with the exception of old Treadgold and he was not a member of the house party, I was conscious that he was the only one who really cared anything about me. He had certainly tried, and more than once, to get me away from Arkwood, almost as though he had foreseen the tragic events that were to befall; and even if he knew more about Elvira Canning than he was prepared to admit, even to the extent, for instance, of her having been an old flame of his, he had behaved well in doing his best to keep me out of it.

Studying him in the sudden quiet that fell upon us all with the Inspector's abrupt departure, I noticed how haggard he looked, yet always with that quiet, watchful air which had intrigued me from the beginning of our acquaintance. I felt sorry for him. I felt I should like to help him. I supposed I could do that best by holding my tongue about the incident of the previous night when I had caught him apparently spying on Disford and Elvira. I wondered what his motive

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could have been: maybe, he was jealous of Glenn. Well, Elvira was out of the way now, I reflected, and the next moment, was ashamed of the thought arising out of my reflection, that I no longer had her to fear as a rival. Poor Elvira—with her spun gold hair and gay green suit I thought of her lying there in the reeds in the blaze of the headlamps; like a drowned bird with plumage all soaked and ruffled.

Rosemary was whispering to me. "What a fright Marcy gave us!"

"How is she now?" I whispered back.

"Asleep. I do hope this damned detective won't insist on questioning her. Glenn was in a panic . . ."

The opening of the door drowned her words. Sir Glenn, looking red and fussed, had come back. Laura, who followed behind, told us with an air of authority to go to bed. But I had in my mind the picture of those keys gently swaying in the lock of the cupboard of Sir Glenn's study and I felt I could not go until I knew whether the cyanide was still in its accustomed place. It was Sir Glenn himself who gave me the answer. As he passed me with Manderton I heard him say to the Inspector: "Since that bottle has disappeared, I'm forced to believe that I must have left that cupboard open. Because, as I told you, the only key to that cupboard is on my chain." And he dangled the ring at the end of the thin gold chain he drew from his dress trousers pocket.

By this Rosemary and old Wace and Eric had gone. My heart was beating fast but I knew it was my cue and I took it. Stepping forward I said to Sir Glenn: "You know you did leave that cupboard open, Sir Glenn, and no later than this evening."

His glare was positively baleful but it did not deter me. "What do you mean, I left the cupboard open?" he rasped.

"When I went to your study at half-past six this evening the cupboard was ajar with the keys in the lock. More than that, I happened to notice that they were swinging back and forth, as though someone had just been at the cupboard."

He was about to reply, but Manderton forestalled him. "Just a moment, sir. Did you see anyone as you came in, Miss?" he asked me.

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"No, Inspector. The room was empty. I was only there a minute or two when Sir Glenn appeared."

Disford nodded—he did not look exactly pleased. "The girl's right," he conceded. "I was in the bedroom changing my coat before going round the farm. Now I come to think of it I do remember looking for my keys and Miss What's-her-name drawing my attention to the fact that they were hanging in the cupboard."

"And you don't recall leaving them there?" the Inspector inquired.

His headshake was stubborn. "I most certainly do not. As far as I know I'd no occasion to go to that cupboard to-day. But I may have left them sticking in the desk."

Manderton addressed me again. "This was at about half-past six, you say, Miss Pell? Where was Mrs. Canning then?"

"Not long before—say, a quarter of an hour—she was with Sir Glenn and me on the terrace. Miss Verge was there, too. Mrs. Canning left us to go in swimming."

Manderton gave me a bleak look. "She wasn't down at the lake before seven," he reminded us.

"Actually she went into the house first to change into her bathing things," said Laura.

"I wonder how she knew about that cyanide in your cupboard, Disford," Mr. Treadgold remarked suavely.

It was Miss Verge who replied. "There was such a fuss about this dog that Sir Glenn had to put out of its misery that most of us knew he had it, I think," she answered with a smile.

"And knew where Sir Glenn kept it?" Mr. Treadgold suggested.

She flushed. "Mrs. Canning may have. She was always in and out of his study. She might easily have seen that bottle in the cupboard." She glanced at Sir Glenn as though hoping he would come to her rescue. But he said nothing, staring in front of him and chewing on his unlighted cigar.

"We needn't keep Miss Pell, or you, either, Sir Glenn," the Scotland Yard man said. "Before you go home," he continued, addressing Mr. Treadgold, "I'd like you to show me just where the dog turned up that wallet." They passed

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out on to the terrace together. Sir Glenn said to Miss Verge: "I'll see how Marcy is and then turn in. You'd best do the same." With a curt nod he strode out.

His disappearance seemed to come as a relief to my companion. Miss Verge dropped into the nearest couch and pressed her hands to her face. When she took them away presently I noticed how wan and tired she looked. It was as though all the calm energy of her expression had been drained away. "Don't go to bed for a moment!" she pleaded. "What I need is a drink, and I think you could do with one, too."

She would have got up, but I made her stay where she was. I poured a brace of highballs, brought hers across to her and gave her a cigarette. She smoked awhile voraciously, drawing in the smoke and expelling it in large puffs. Unexpectedly she patted my hand as I sat beside her on the couch. "I like you, child. You know when not to talk. It's a great gift."

"There's so much to think about."

She nodded and sighed. "Oh, yes."

"I can't help feeling terrible about Elvira Canning," I said. "She was so brilliant, so vital. One has to be sorry for people who commit suicide—I mean they must go through such anguish, making up their minds to do it. And they have to go through with it alone."

She grunted. "While you're about it you could spare a little sympathy for your friend, Danbury, it seems to me."

I caught my breath. "You mean, it's established—the police believe—that it was she who killed that wretched creature?"

"Is there any doubt about it? Of course she killed him. Her suicide proves it."

"I suppose he came down here to blackmail her. About those diamonds her husband stole on board the *Red Knight*."

"I expect so. That was why she was so anxious to get rid of his wallet—to prevent identification, you know."

"It's awful thinking of her stabbing him like that. I find it hard to see her doing it."

"She was an adventuress, the wife of a criminal, one of the criminal classes, for all we know to the contrary." She

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shook her head. "Glenn was taken in by her all right. I agree with you, it must have needed courage to kill that ruffian at the inn: I can't help wondering whether he was the first person she'd used a knife on. I expect we shall have some shocks when Inspector Manderton produces her record." She rose. "I must just run over and see that G.D. has really gone up. Once he settles down in that study of his . . . Coming?"

"I think I'll sit here a little and finish my cigarette."

"Good night then. Put out the lights when you go up—the switches are by the door." She nodded to me and went quietly out. I finished my drink and was stubbing my cigarette in the ashtray when I looked up and saw Mr. Treadgold standing in the french window.

I jumped up. "I thought you'd gone home ages ago."

He gazed at me gloomily. "I'm in no mood for bed. I'm thinking about that wallet."

"What about it?"

"Why did Mrs. Canning want to wrap it in that green scarf of hers that everybody in the house knows?"

"I suppose so that she could find it again when she wanted it?"

His nod was glum. "Well, that's an explanation, perhaps. But if she could find it again, so could anyone else. It wasn't buried, you know—it was only tucked away between two logs. Besides, a night's rain would have ruined it, reduced those papers it contained to pulp. It was in a sealed envelope when she gave it to you, you say?"

"I can't be sure about it because, of course, I didn't open the envelope. She said it contained papers that she didn't want to go astray."

He grunted. "Well, the wallet contained papers, didn't it? And the best proof that it was the wallet that was sealed up in that envelope is the fact that the envelope disappeared from your wardrobe. But why should she want to take it back almost as soon as she'd given it to you for safe keeping?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I can't imagine."

"And why should she have taken it out of its envelope?"

"I've no idea."

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"Everything has a motive in life. What happened that was likely to lead her to take the wallet back? The only event with any important bearing on the case that developed after she'd given you that envelope was Inspector Mander-ton's arrival on the scene. Far from taking that envelope back I'd say she would have hugged herself for having got rid of the one really incriminating piece of evidence against her. What then does the fact that the wallet was taken out of its envelope suggest?" He had grown so eager that he did not wait for my answer. "Don't you see? It was not Elvira who took it from your wardrobe because she would have known from the fact that the seal was unbroken—that the contents were intact—it was somebody else."

I stared at him. "Somebody else? But who could it be?"

"That's what's interfering with my sleep. Let's explore a bit. In the first place, did anyone except Mrs. Canning know you had this envelope?"

"I didn't tell a soul. But now I come to think of it, Eric Clayden was outside Wace's cottage this morning when Mrs. Canning gave me that envelope because he came in directly afterwards."

He gazed at me thoughtfully. "Clayden, eh? Anyone else around?"

"Ronnie Barber turned up a little later."

He frowned. "Barber, eh?"

"Mrs. Canning took a charm bangle off her wrist to give me. I didn't want to accept it but she insisted and left it on the table. Barber recognized it when he came in and guessed she'd been visiting there. He tried to make me tell him what she'd wanted and when I refused he went off in a rage." I paused. "I've wondered since whether it wasn't a bangle he'd given her. They seem to be quite good friends."

He nodded. "So I've noticed. Could anyone have seen you put that envelope away?"

I thought back. "I don't think so. Wait! I've just remembered why I put it where I did. I had it in my hand in front of the open wardrobe when Miss Verge came in

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suddenly to tell me about the inquest and I shoved it in the first place handy."

His gaze was thoughtful. "Miss Verge, eh? The lady with the cape . . ."

"Look," I laughed, "you're not going to start suspecting poor Miss Verge, are you?"

He humped his shoulders. "That's what keeps me from my bed. I can't get what a celebrated French detective of my acquaintance used to call 'the picture.' And when I can't get 'the picture' I'm apt to suspect everybody." He broke off. "Who's that, I wonder?"

There was a footstep in the corridor. Eric Clayden put his head in. "Hullo, still up? Have the minions of the law departed? My gracious, Uncle Toby, you're keeping late hours, aren't you?"

"What do you know about this wallet of Danbury's that turned up in the Prince Consort's Walk to-night, Eric?" Mr. Treadgold demanded.

The question was blunt and its tone seemed to jar. "What should I know about it?" Clayden demanded.

"You knew about the envelope that Mrs. Canning gave Clarissa, didn't you?"

I stole an admiring glance at Mr. Treadgold. It was an absolute shot in the dark, but it went home. "And what if I did?" Clayden retorted with a sulky air.

"Did you speak of it to anyone?"

A flush warmed Clayden's rather ruddy complexion. For a moment he did not reply. Then he said reluctantly: "I might have mentioned it to old Wace."

"To Wace, eh?"

But Clayden had not waited. With an indignant look from me to his questioner he stamped out.

Mr. Treadgold chuckled. "The investigation broadens. Maybe, now I shall be able to sleep." He patted me on the shoulder. "Happy dreams, Clarissa, I'll be toddling. No, don't come with me—I've my car in the yard. Good night!"

I looked after him, puzzled. I could not see how old Wace or Eric, either, fitted into what he had called "the picture."

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What was certain was that Uncle Toby, no longer glum, had gone off to his bed in high good humour. With a sigh I closed the french window and going to the door, opened it preparatory to turning off the lights.

I jumped back with a start. Ronnie Barber was outside in the corridor. "Why is old Treadgold hanging round here still?" he demanded.

I drew away. "I don't see that it's any business of yours."

"If it weren't my business, I wouldn't be asking."

"Then ask him yourself!"

"I'm asking *you*!"

His tone infuriated me. "Don't you ever get tired of spying on people?"

He glared at me. "What's that you said?"

"I said, 'Don't you ever get tired of spying on people?'"

On that he came at me out of the dark corridor. As he emerged into the light I saw how pale he was, with the perspiration gleaming on his face and a dank lock drooping across his forehead. With eyes hot with anger he advanced on me and before I realized what he was doing, struck me across the cheek with his open hand.

It was not a very hard slap but I was naturally enraged. I sprang back out of his reach and in doing so collided with the table of drinks arranged on a metal tray that clanged like a gong on my impact. "Are you crazy?" he snapped. "Do you want to rouse the house?"

I grabbed a syphon. "You dare lay hands on me again and I'll rouse the house all right!" I raised my syphon. "If you come a step nearer I'll bash this bottle over your head!"

"You darn little fool," he growled, but he did not advance any closer, "for two pins I'd box your ears again! How dare you accuse me of eavesdropping! I bring you to this house..."

"You didn't. It was Mr. Treadgold..."

"Don't contradict me!"

"I'll contradict you if I want to!"

"It was my suggestion in the first place. And what do I get for it? Nothing but insults and abuse whenever we meet!"

"I never insulted you!"

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"You did—you're always insulting me. Why, only to-night, when that thick-headed policeman was questioning me, you stood there staring at me as though I'd poisoned Elvira!"

I laughed. "So now I'm not even allowed to look at you without your flying into a rage!"

"Don't evade the issue!"

"You're talking nonsense. Such an idea never entered my head." But I felt myself colour up.

"Don't lie! You can't deceive me!"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Why did you have to wait for old Wace to tell the police about that cyanide? Don't pretend you didn't know about it when you yourself described to me how Sir Glenn used it to poison that dog of his!"

That got under his skin. The anger faded from his eyes and his face grew sulky. I seized the opportunity to put my syphon back on the tray. "Why didn't you tell Manderton about it yourself, if it comes to that?" he said sarcastically.

"It was none of my business."

"You were quite matey with Elvira, weren't you?"

"Not that I know of. Much less than you were, I think."

He flushed. "What were you doing with her bangle?" he demanded sullenly.

"Oh, that!" I said.

"'Oh, that!' is no answer."

"It's the only one you're going to get." I picked up my cigarette-case and lighter from the couch. "If you've quite finished questioning me, I think I'll go to bed."

"Clarissa," he said with a sigh, "do we have to quarrel every time we meet?"

"Hadn't you better ask yourself that question?"

He put his hand on my arm. "Clarissa!"

I shook him off. "Let me pass! Or perhaps you'd like to hit me again?"

At that—the nerve of it!—he actually laughed. "I felt sure you'd bring that up. But I'm not going to apologize, if that's what you're angling after."

Then I became really mad. "I'm not angling after anything, as you call it, except my bed."

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He laughed again: he still barred the way. "I admit I lost my temper just now. But you simply asked for it—you're so insufferably small-minded, so dumb!"

I gasped. "How dare you say such things to me! I don't know where you were brought up, but where I come from, if a man so far forgets himself as to strike a woman, the least he is expected to do is to apologize."

He smiled—his conceited air was too infuriating. "You're absolutely entrancing. You talk exactly like Emily What's-her-Name's *Book of Etiquette*!"

"In America a man doesn't want any book of etiquette to tell him how to behave as a gentleman!"

He was suddenly serious. "You're dead right—real men and women don't have to be told how to behave, do they? I was only teasing you. I love to see you when you're angry. You're such a genuine person. Anger becomes you."

"That's a cheap compliment and I hate compliments."

"All right. This is the truth then. As I told you before—I liked you from the word 'Go'—from that very first evening in the forward bar of the *Queen Mary*—and it galls me to find you always so hostile, so suspicious of me."

"It's nobody's fault but your own."

"Maybe. But look at it this way. Do you realize that you and I are the only two perfectly normal people in this house, that's to say, who are not eaten up by jealousy or greed? Dash it, Clarissa, I'm sorry I slapped you but this business about Elvira came as a terrible shock to me and well, I expect my nerves just went."

His tone was humble now, but I could not forget that slap. "You're always so smooth," I told him crossly. "You think you can make everybody eat out of your hand. Well, I'm not built that way. I like people I can trust. I loathe people who go tiptoeing about, listening at keyholes, like that odious Eric."

His hand rumbled his hair. "Looks bad for me, doesn't it? Because, you see, I can't explain. You'll admit, I suppose, that all the trouble between us has come of my trying to persuade you to leave this house."

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I nodded. "It's almost as though you knew what was going to happen!"

He sighed, then said suddenly: "Trust me, can't you? Give me the benefit of the doubt!"

I looked him in the eye. "I don't see why I should. How do I know where you really stand in all this? After all, Elvira Canning was quite a friend of yours, wasn't she?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"Tell me something—when you saw her down at the lake this evening what did she seem like?"

"A bit on edge, perhaps."

"What did she have to say about Inspector Manderton wanting to see her?"

"She asked me if I knew what he wanted with her. Actually it was the first I'd heard of it."

"Manderton called up around six o'clock. Everybody else appears to have known he was coming to see Elvira."

He sighed. "All I can say is that nobody told me."

"Did she seem worried?"

He shook his head. "Not particularly."

"Then why did she poison herself? Seeing that she must have done it soon after you left her, you'd have thought she'd have been frightened to death, distraught. Or else..."

"Or else what?"

"Did you say anything to scare her?"

His headshake was firm. "On my word of honour. You know, from what Manderton told us, she must have led a pretty adventurous life. She was a tough proposition."

"She must have been to have killed that poor wretch like that. What else did you talk about?"

"Nothing much. She didn't like Manderton, apparently, and said she hoped Glenn would keep him in order. Then she asked me to get her a drink and told me I was the only person at Arkwood except Glenn who knew how to make a decent dry Martini and, oh, well, I asked if I could borrow her car, and then I buzzed off."

"There was something I wanted to ask you," I said. "Did she ever tell you she had been on the *Red Knight*?"

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He shook his head, pursing his lips. "Never." I was watching his face and it appeared to me that his expression had altered. He seemed to be suddenly on his guard.

"Because," I pursued, "if the police had known about it when Danbury was murdered she'd have been the first person they'd have suspected, she'd have been arrested and so wouldn't have been able to commit suicide."

A slipper clacked in the corridor outside. Clayden was at the door in his flowered silk dressing-gown, smoking a cigarette out of a long holder. "Are you two deaf? Didn't you hear the telephone ringing?"

"Who was it?" said Barber.

"Manderton." With a thoughtful air he sliced his ash into a flower bowl. "What did you want over at Maiden Shapley this evening, Ronnie?"

With a flaming match in his hand Barber was about to light a cigarette. He paused in the act and I saw the match burn down to his fingers. "Why?" he asked.

Clayden sniggered. "Of course, Maiden Shapley, population five thousand or something, is an important centre of industry and commerce. Still one might be curious to know what pressing business took you over there so urgently at eight o'clock at night . . ."

"One might also be told to mind one's own damned business, my dear Eric."

The other laughed. "You'd better tell that to Inspector Manderton."

"Oh, why?"

"Because he's on his way up here now to ask you that very question."

I glanced apprehensively at Barber. His face betrayed nothing. Clayden went on: "When you went to Maiden Shapley to-night, did you take that old mack of yours?"

"Yes."

"You left it on the seat of Elvira's car. It's only a trifling detail, and a matter that I feel sure you can satisfactorily explain, but they found that missing bottle of cyanide in the pocket."

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He raised his hand in salute. " 'Exit Good Fairy through crack in hedge!' " he remarked facetiously and slipslapped out.

Barber had whistled softly. "My hat," he observed, giving me a quizzing glance, "it really looks as if you'd have to trust me, doesn't it?"

Then, without the slightest warning, he leaned forward and with infinite tenderness, slid his arms about me and drew me to him. Before I knew what was happening he had kissed me fairly and squarely on the mouth. And I, idiot that I was, although he had had the effrontery to slap my face not five minutes before, not only did I not resist him, but I kissed him back.

Some underling of Manderton's must have sent that message for the next moment a step outside sent us flying apart and Laura bustled in to say that the Inspector had already arrived. At the sight of me she exclaimed: "Clarissa, child, you should have been in bed ages ago!" and whisked me away. The last glimpse I had of my young man, he stood aloof, lighting his cigarette with an unsteady hand.

Chapter Twenty

I WENT to bed with my mind in a whirr. I grasped at once what Clayden's announcement portended. Ronnie Barber had mixed the cocktail for Elvira, after which she had been found dead of poison. And now the poison bottle had turned up in his possession. This was not suicide—it was murder, and the searchlight of suspicion was fair and square upon Barber. I tried to tell myself that there must be some explanation. Barber knew about the cyanide in Sir Glenn's safe and recognizing the bottle—either that Elvira had poisoned herself in his presence or he had come upon her after she was dead—had carried it off to save his hosts from embarrassing complications.

It was not convincing. And if it did not convince me I felt very sure it would convince Inspector Manderton even

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less. That plodding, persistent individual was taking nothing and nobody on trust. I wondered, even as I turned and tossed, what was going on behind the closed doors of the lounge.

I tried to think calmly, to face the facts. What would I have made of the case if I had read of it in the newspapers? Danbury comes to Burstowe to blackmail Elvira Canning in connection with some obscure business to do with the loss of the *Red Knight*. She is suspected of killing him and is later found poisoned herself in circumstances that at first point to suicide, but afterwards suggest murder when the bottle containing the poison is found in the possession of a man who was not only a close friend of hers but also mixed the drink that caused her death. As an ordinary newspaper reader, would I not have immediately jumped to the conclusion that Barber was himself in some way involved in the *Red Knight* mystery or even that he, and not Elvira, had murdered Danbury for some motive that had yet to appear?

Suspensions came pouring into my mind. Why had he tried so hard to make me leave Arkwood? Why had he begged me so insistently to trust him, to give him the benefit of the doubt, as he put it? What was the explanation of his nocturnal roving at Arkwood, the true relations between him and Elvira Canning? Wasn't his whole attitude towards me a tacit admission of guilt?

Sleep was not for me, I decided, and clambering out of my high four-poster, I slipped into my dressing-gown and taking my cigarettes, installed myself by the open window. The night was velvety and the moon flecked with silver the treetops of the park. Plumes of mist steamed on the surface of the lake. They seemed to me like symbols of the uncertainty in which I groped.

I wanted to be honest with myself about Ronnie. Somehow, I could not feel that he could be guilty of anything so abominable as this crime. I had been full of resentment against him; but now that he was in trouble all my rancour was slipping away. He had slapped me, yet, in spite of it and indeed, in spite of myself I had let him kiss me, not to

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mention talk me into forming a sort of alliance with him; and this notwithstanding the fact that he had shown himself high-handed and conceited and patronizing towards me. I knew now that I felt towards him as I had felt towards no man I had ever met before, an indescribable tenderness that left me unspeakably unhappy when, as now, I sat alone and thought of him suffering, and knew that I could not help him. I had one consolation: he liked me—not once, but twice, he had told me so. And he had kissed me! The memory of that fleeting moment when he had held me in his arms pierced the darkness that blanketed my mind like a solitary light that, as I watched from my window, came and went among the bushes by the lake's edge where, I supposed, the police were still pursuing their investigations.

The sky was red by the time I at last dropped off. When I awoke I was still in my chair with the sun pouring into my room. As I sat there trying to assemble my thoughts, I heard the stable clock in the distance begin to strike. I counted the strokes, then sprang up in a panic. Ten o'clock! Old Wace would be waiting for me—from what I had seen of him I did not think he was the type of man to allow a little thing like a violent death in the house to interfere with his day's routine. I rang the bell and leapt for the bath. But my nice Cox, who presently brought my breakfast, set my fears at rest. Miss Verge had said I was not to be disturbed—Mr. Wace was ill. A certain note of disapproval in the girl's voice suggested to me that the ogre-like Tris had had another of his lapses—and who, in the circumstances, should blame him?

While Cox laid out my things I pumped her for news. She had not seen anything of Mr. Barber but Sir Glenn with Miss Verge and Mr. Clayden had gone off first thing to Maiden Shapley in the Rolls. Lady Disford was not getting up, and Miss Rosemary was with her. Apparently, the servants' hall had not yet heard about the discovery of the cyanide bottle. About Elvira, Cox had plenty to say. It was "ever so dreadful" about "the pore lady." "I'd never have said as she was the one to make away with herself,"

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Cox declared solemnly. "We had a kitchenmaid in my last place as threw herself in front of the train. But she was a gloomy one, with never a 'Good morning!' on her lips and always reading to herself out loud out of her Bible. But that pore Mrs. Canning! Always gay as a lark, she was, and very 'uman with all below stairs. Why, only last week, she gave Edie, as looks after her, a lovely lot of silk stockings, some, by the look of them, as she can hardly have had on but the once." She shook her head sadly. "Dearie me, she was too pretty to die like that!"

It might have stood for poor Elvira's epitaph.

I was sitting down to my breakfast in a very mournful frame of mind when I saw a note propped up against the teapot. It was from Mr. Treadgold. A walk in the woods, he wrote, would do me good. If the idea appealed to me, he would call for me at eleven. He would bring some sandwiches and we might have a picnic lunch under the trees. If he did not hear from me he would take it I would meet him.

My heart overflowed with gratitude as I read. This was Uncle Toby's idea of getting me out of the tragic atmosphere of Arkwood, if only for a few hours—it was sweet of him to think of it. I told him as much when I met him in the hall an hour later, a placid, smiling figure in an old shooting jacket and grey flannels with a haversack slung across him. "All I plead for, madam, is strict justice," he said with a little bow, "and that you do so much of it, to me as well as to yourself, as not to prejudice, or receive such an impression of me, till you have better evidence." He rolled this off with such an unctuous air that I cried: "*From Tristram Shandy?*"

He chortled. "*Tristram Shandy*, it is. In other words, to be absolutely honest with you, maybe I have an ulterior motive." With a knowing air he laid a finger on his nose.

We went out by the stables and through some rickyards that brought us to a swinging iron gate in a fence enclosing some shrubberies. It was a magnificent morning with a cloudless sky and the fields swimming in the heat haze. My ankle gave me no trouble now but walking under that

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sun was warm work and I was not sorry when presently, after climbing a stile, we plunged into a deep belt of forest.

It was peaceful and fragrant under the trees. The drowsy murmur of insects and the chatter of the jays were the only sounds as we threaded a rutted cart-track past the enormous boles of oaks and beeches. A pheasant went cackling up. "This is part of Disford's coverts," said Mr. Treadgold, pausing to mop his face with a bandanna handkerchief. "They have a lot of big shooting parties here in the autumn, Hendersley was telling me."

We had not exchanged a word about Elvira Canning since we had set out. But now I ventured a question. "You know that they located the cyanide bottle?" I said.

My companion nodded. "So I understand. . . ."

I stopped and looked at him. "And Ronnie Barber?"

Mr. Treadgold returned my gaze—he had the bluest, kindest eyes. "They took him to Maiden Shapley last night."

"You mean—they've *arrested* him?"

"Frankly, I don't know. The police have polite fictions for expressing the same idea. But he spent the night at 'The Pheasant' there."

"But surely you don't believe . . .?"

"Belief has nothing to do with it. In crime investigation I know of no half-way house between disbelief and conviction. It is entirely a matter of the deductive processes. You and I are the only entirely unprejudiced witnesses of the events that have taken place at Arkwood. Therefore, you and I are going to indulge in a little quiet deduction. Now do you understand why I asked you to lunch?"

I laughed—rather nervously, I expect, because a mass of questions were burning on my lips. "But Ronnie Barber . . ."

"Not yet," he told me and took my arm. "Lunch first and when we are in a suitably detached frame of mind—deduction. Come, let's look for a nice spot to eat!"

Under a huge oak my companion unpacked his haversack. There were hard-boiled eggs, caviar and chicken sandwiches, cheese and biscuits, and an apple apiece. With them was a

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large thermos bottle. "I leave such things to my man as a rule," Mr. Treadgold observed, unscrewing the cap. "Let's see what his idea is of a hot weather drink." He sniffed. "Iced cider cup. Can do?" "Chop-chop!" I cried gaily. And he filled me a cup.

As we ate our lunch under the tree I felt my dejection imperceptibly lifting. The stillness all about us was a balm in itself, and there was something rocklike about my companion's composure that I found distinctly comforting. When we had finished and I had stowed the last remnants of our meal away in the haversack, he drew a battered leather volume from his pocket. "When I want to clear my mind, my little Clarissa," he said, "I always turn to the wisest book I know. For all his tortuous style old Sterne has wit, and irony, and tenderness and, shining through a good deal of turgid philosophy, the most limpid common sense. Therefore, when I'm conscious, as sometimes happens when I'm trying to make sense of a crime problem, that I've allowed my imagination to go jogging off along bridle-paths, I only have to open my *Tristram Shandy* to be steered straight back upon the highroad of clear reasoning." He looked at me almost shyly. "Could you bear it if I were to read to you the story of Uncle Toby and the fly? It's quite short."

"I'd like it very much."

He donned his horn-rimmed glasses and opened his book. "It has no bearing on the case, you understand, but I find that Sterne's simple English stimulates the subconscious mind. . . ." Perceiving that I did not follow him very well, he hastily began to read aloud:

"My Uncle Toby had scarce the heart to retaliate upon a fly. "Go!" says he, one day at dinner, to an overgrown one which had buzzed about his nose, and tormented him cruelly all dinner-time and which, after infinite attempts, he had caught at last, as it flew by him; "I'll not hurt thee," says my Uncle Toby, rising from his chair, and going across the room, with the fly in his hand, "I'll not hurt a hair of thy head. Go!" says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape, "Go, poor devil, get thee

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gone, why should I hurt thee? This world is surely wide enough to hold both thee and me. . . .”

His voice ceased. He sighed and removed his glasses. “It’s charming,” said I, “and you read it beautifully!” Without speaking he put his book back in his pocket and producing his pipe, with a thoughtful, brooding air, began to fill it. We sat for several minutes in silence, by which time his pipe was well alight. At last he said: “This is one of these cases, my little Clarissa, which builds up, step by step. Do you follow me?”

“Not very well, yet.”

“It’s a matter of putting first things first. We go back to the murder at the Sedgwicke Arms. Danbury, purser’s steward on the *Red Knight*, evidently had some knowledge, which he hoped to turn into money, about Elvira Canning’s connection with the disappearance of those diamonds from the purser’s safe on the night of the wreck. Right?”

“Right.”

“The presumption is that she killed Danbury in order to avert a scandal. There is actually not a shred of *prima facie* evidence to connect her with the crime. That is to say, almost anybody in the house—the Disfords, Rosemary, Miss Verge, Clayden, Barber, Wace—could have borrowed that cloak of Miss Verge’s because, as I can tell you, late at night, when people have gone to bed, it is next to impossible to produce an alibi. In fact, for what it’s worth—and few alibis are worth a great deal—the only real alibi we have among the members of the house party at Arkwood is Disford’s. Lady Disford told Manderton that her husband came up to their room just before midnight and went to bed, the inference, of course, being that he didn’t stir out until morning. There is, however, the very strong point against Mrs. Canning that, as far as we can tell, she was the only person in the house who had any interest in killing Danbury. Agreed?”

“I think you make it very clear.”

He removed his pipe. “But this is where the stream is muddied. Since I saw you yesterday the old subconscious

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mind has been active—about that wallet, you know.” He fixed his eyes on me intently. “What does kümmel say to you?”

“Kümmel?”

“Yes, kümmel. That green scarf of Elvira’s was saturated with the stuff. Why?”

“Maybe, she spilled some over it at dinner. She used to carry that scarf in the evenings, sometimes.”

“What’s kümmel made from?”

I laughed. “I’m afraid I haven’t the remotest idea.”

“It’s aniseed. Are you aware that aniseed has the strongest attraction for dogs? It’s what they soak the drag with, at drag hunts.”

I stared at him. “Uncle Toby! You mean, Rumpus was *meant* to turn it up?”

“Rumpus or any other dog. That wallet was intended to be found. That was why it wasn’t buried but tucked just out of sight on the grass.”

“But why should Elvira . . . ?”

He closed his teeth hard on his pipe. “Elvira, my foot! Who ever stole that wallet from your wardrobe planted it out there in the Prince Consort’s Walk with the deliberate intention of linking her beyond all shadow of doubt with the murder at the inn! Note that this false clue wasn’t laid until it was generally known in the house that Manderton was going to question Elvira. And then it was laid with a specific purpose. Has it occurred to you how conveniently Elvira Canning died?”

His pipe had gone out. I found his manner rather frightening, it had become so intense. “How do you mean ‘conveniently’?” I faltered.

“Somebody—someone in this house—wasn’t going to run the risk of her blabbing.” His face became stern. “When that false clue was planted, Elvira Canning was already doomed to die. It was intended to explain her subsequent death by establishing her as Danbury’s murderer.”

I stared at him aghast. On the instant Ronnie Barber came into my mind. Such a wave of suspicion overcame me that, for a long moment, I was unable to speak. “Then

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you mean," I stammered, "that Elvira didn't kill Danbury and that she didn't commit suicide, and that someone in the house—somebody else—was behind both deaths?"

"Just that," he said, and frowning fell to sucking his unlighted pipe.

"But, look here," I objected, "she had Danbury's wallet. How do you account for that?"

"I'm not saying that she didn't know who killed Danbury: the hyphen between them was the wreck of the *Red Knight*. She may even have been in on the killing—I don't know. But I do submit, and this is the line of reasoning I propose to pursue for the moment, that the incident of that false clue taken in conjunction with the circumstances of her death point to the fact that she was not a principal in all this and that somewhere in the background lurks a master mind, ruthless and determined, resolved at all costs to see that the mystery of what happened in the purser's office the night the *Red Knight* was wrecked is never cleared up." With a stern air he knocked out his pipe on the tree trunk.

The peaceful scene about us had not changed. The sun rode high in the bluest of blue skies and through the bright green foliage above our heads cast dappled patterns on my bare arms. But I felt as though a dank mist had descended upon our smiling glade. With a more composed air my companion was refilling his pipe from his well-worn pouch. I had taken it as a compliment that Mr. Treadgold had invited me to discuss the tragic events at Arkwood with him. But I perceived now very clearly that what he wanted was a sympathetic listener to whom he could air his theories. Seeing that he was patting his pockets for a match, I handed him my box. Setting a light to his pipe and puffing strongly, he began to speak again.

"I told you that this was a matter of putting first things first," he said. "Let's therefore return to the murder at the inn and begin with that." He stretched out long and sturdy legs and, leaning back against his tree trunk, gazed aloft into the branches. "Note, first, how the tang of the sea clings to this crime. Take the weapon, to begin with. Nearly all

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seamen carry knives, in proof of which a sheath knife was found in Danbury's kit and he was killed with a knife, and a pretty hefty one at that, by what Dr. Hammond tells me, although, as you know, the weapon was never discovered."

A little red squirrel peered cautiously out from behind an adjoining tree. Mr. Treadgold paused a moment to watch it and went on: "In crime investigation, the probable, as against the improbable, is almost inevitably the most fruitful field to explore first. It's the Scotland Yard rule, and it's a sound one. Surveying the whole of the circumstances surrounding the murder of Danbury we perceive a number of threads leading back to Arkwood. In the first place, those pebbles cast up at your window suggest a certain familiarity with the inn geography: in the second place, the door in the park wall affords easy and unobserved access to the yard of the Sedgwicke Arms; and in the third place, the discovery of a button from Miss Verge's cloak close to the scene of the crime furnishes a further link with Arkwood. Upon Arkwood, therefore, our inquiries should focus, and if—to develop the thought I expressed just now—we are to seek Danbury's murderer there, it seems to me that we should start by looking for someone to whom this tang of the sea attaches."

I began to feel uncomfortable. This idea of a murder hunt in a house where I was a guest was so cold-blooded that it appalled me. Besides, I was thinking of Ronnie and wondering miserably what the deadly system of analysis I was listening to might not drag to light about him. "Mr. Treadgold," I said, "I'm a guest of these people and they've been awfully kind to me. I'm afraid you'll have to leave me out of this."

His glance dropped to me, almost startled, as though he had forgotten my existence. "Sorry! I should have warned you of my bad habit of thinking aloud." He took his pipe from his mouth. "But, you know, you can't be left out. Crime is like a stone dropped into a pond. It makes ever widening circles that draw into their rings all kinds of twigs and bits of straw floating on the surface. Well, all of you at Arkwood are so many twigs whirling in the eddies caused

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by these two mysterious deaths. Whether you like it or not, my dear, that's the position and you'll have to accept it."

He stuck his pipe back between his teeth, with an air of finality as though the matter were disposed of. Gazing up into the tree once more, he said: "Do you know what young Barber does for a living?"

I trembled inwardly. "No."

"He's an accountant."

I felt an upward surge of relief. "That sounds harmless enough."

"Quite. The Knight Line is one of his clients. His firm audits their books. Rather an odd coincidence, don't you think?"

I felt my heart miss a beat. "I suppose it is."

"He's travelled a good deal, apparently—South Africa, the States. Do you know whether he was ever in the merchant service?"

I moistened dry lips. "I can't say. I'm afraid he never told me anything about himself."

Mr. Treadgold's eyes were on me. "Good gracious, Clarissa, don't look so scared!"

"I can't help thinking of that cyanide bottle," I said miserably.

"Naturally. But before jumping to any conclusions let's wait and hear what the young man has to say about it. If he can produce an alibi . . ."

"An alibi?"

"Elvira Canning's body was discovered around half-past ten o'clock. Dr. Hammond says she'd been dead for not more than three hours. Barber claims to have left her at half-past seven, so you see it's pretty close timing. What was he doing between half-past seven and the time he was back at Arkwood, around nine thirty?"

"He says he went over to Maiden Shapley."

"Quite. In that case he should find no difficulty in producing witnesses to prove it."

The squirrel had popped out again and was watching us, propped up on its bushy tail, an acorn between its paws. A little silence fell while Mr. Treadgold relit his pipe. Puffing

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vigorously, he said: "Did you know that old Wace went to sea in his early days?"

I shook my head. "No."

"He was telling me about it while we were playing golf one day. He spent several years before the mast just for the experience and made one or two trips home with those big clipper-ships from South America."

I looked quickly at him. "The tang of the sea!"

He met my gaze calmly. "The tang of the sea. Tris didn't like Elvira, did he?"

"He hated her. He accused her of coming between him and Sir Glenn."

He smoked in silence for a while. Then he said suddenly: "Did you ever notice Glenn Disford's right forearm?"

I laughed. "I can't say I did."

"I only noticed it myself last night. I was in his study with Laura after we'd returned from the lake. He came down there after seeing Marcia to bed and Laura made him take off his coat as it was all wet. She fetched him another coat from his bedroom and he changed there in front of us and I happened to catch sight of his forearm. There's an anchor tattooed on it."

"Is that so significant? After all, lots of men who've travelled get themselves tattooed in Japan or somewhere."

"Quite. But an anchor?"

I nodded. "I get you. The tang of the sea again."

He shifted his position against the tree trunk and puffed at his pipe. "Do you remember my telling you I felt sure Disford represented a type—but a type I couldn't place? To meet, he's obviously a good business man, methodical, shrewd, and probably pretty hard, while the way the house and the estate generally are run here suggests that he's used to organization. What type does he evoke? Wait, I'll give you a hint. You'll have to forget his moustache which is what misled me. Supposing he were clean-shaven. Now then?"

I shook my head. "I'm afraid I'm no good at spotting types, Uncle Toby."

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"Use your brains, girl. You've travelled on ocean liners, haven't you?"

"Only on the *Queen Mary*."

"Good enough. Do you mean to say he doesn't recall any type to your mind? Those heavy serge suits of his, the square-toed shoes, the solid build . . ."

"I never saw the captain very close . . ."

He shook his head. "Not the captain! You can always tell an ocean-going skipper by the eyes. It's a purser, my dear!"

"A purser?"

"It came to me only last night in bed. Looking back I recall very well the first occasion when I had the impression that he represented a type. It was on your first evening at Arkwood, when he was pouring out the champagne—you remember, after that blow-up over Mrs. Canning at the bridge table. It's odd how the mind works—maybe, the sight of him fussing about with the bottle and glasses touched some hidden chord in my memory, some recollection of a purser's party I'd been to on board ship. I've been to so many of them: after all, I've crossed the Atlantic more than two hundred times." He broke off. "Now then, what was Danbury?"

"Danbury was a steward."

"A *purser's* steward," he precised. He stopped, bending his brows at me. "But what's the matter, Clarissa?"

My mind had gone back to the evening he spoke of. "What you said about Sir Glenn pouring the champagne has just reminded me of something—something Danbury said to me when we were having supper together at the inn. A proverb he quoted."

"A proverb?"

"Well, a sort of saying. The landlord was pouring our drinks and Danbury didn't approve of the way he was doing it. So he snatches the bottle away from him and says: 'Don't you know the rule among gentlemen? "A woman by the waist, a bottle by the neck!"' "

Mr. Treadgold chortled. "That's good. I never heard that one."

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"Wait! The point is that the very next evening, when I was helping Sir Glenn pour the champagne and managed to spill some, he took the bottle from me with the very same words."

"Did he, begad? Did you tell him that Danbury had quoted the same proverb?"

"Sure."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing much. Only something about sailors having a funny way of expressing themselves." I paused. "I've often noticed, haven't you, that no sooner does one hear a saying like this than it's bound to crop up unexpectedly directly afterwards?"

He nodded absently. "Quite!" he said and fell to smoking in silence.

A voice hailed us through the trees. Rosemary in her blue slacks was visible approaching along the track. We rose to our feet and waved. "We don't want to start any gossip we can avoid," Mr. Treadgold continued as Rosemary drew nearer. "So keep your own counsel about the views I've been expressing because we've a long road to travel before we reach the truth—maybe, a dangerous road at that." He spoke gravely. "Not a word to anyone, remember?"

"O.K.!"

Then Rosemary, looking very hot, strolled up. "Hullo, you two conspirators, what are you confabbing about?" was her greeting. "Havilland said I'd find you somewhere along here. Marcy's resting: I thought I'd go crazy sitting alone in that house. Anything left to drink?"

"Some cider cup," Mr. Treadgold replied, rooting in his haversack.

"Darling Uncle Toby, you always come up to scratch!"

She drank and handed him back the cup. "Glenn came back from Shapley in a filthy temper and proceeded to have the most shattering row with Eric at lunch—you know, about the act he put on last night. Havilland practically had to separate them."

Mr. Treadgold rubbed his nose with his pipe. "Eric went a bit far, I thought."

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"Did Sir Glenn bring back any news about Ronnie, Rosemary?" I asked.

She began to laugh. "D'you mean to say you haven't heard?"

My heart seemed to stand still. "No. What is it?"

"It's really too priceless. They took him to Shapley last night and he had to spend the night there while they were investigating something or other about his movements. They put him up at 'The Pheasant' with a policeman outside his door. Well, during the night Ronnie escaped—out by the window and over the roof of the billiard room—and got clean away. Superintendent Maggs is raving, Glenn says." She paused. "Joking apart, it's pretty serious. I mean to say, it looks as if he actually poisoned that unfortunate Elvira, doesn't it? I'm beginning to think that it must have been Ronnie who killed this wretch at the inn and then got rid of Elvira to prevent her giving him away. What do you think, Uncle Toby?"

Mr. Treadgold grunted and picked up his panama from the ground. "How old is young Barber?" he asked.

Rosemary shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I don't know—about thirty, I should say."

"And the *Red Knight* was lost twenty years ago. Therefore, our young friend must have been about ten years old at the time!"

I could have hugged him for squelching her like that, but Rosemary stuck to her guns. "Don't be ridiculous," she exclaimed. "Of course, nobody claims that he was on board the *Red Knight* when she went down. But that's not to say that he didn't know what there was between Elvira and this miserable Danbury. To see Ronnie and Elvira together, you'd have said that she had no secrets from him. Isn't that so, Clarissa?"

Mr. Treadgold saved me from the necessity of replying. Cramming his hat on his head, he remarked: "Come, I'll walk with you as far as the stables where I left my car."

Where the drive branched off Rosemary left us to go on to the house—she had suddenly remembered she had promised

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to make a call to London for Marcia. I lingered to say good-bye to Mr. Treadgold. "Are you doing anything particular this evening?" he asked me.

"No. Why?"

"I have a lot of scattered notes about this case that want typing out in order. Would it be a bore if you came down to me after dinner, say for about an hour?"

"Not on your life."

"Nineish, then? I'll send my car over."

"I'll be waiting. I loved our picnic and everything."

He gave me rather a bleak look. "It may not always appear at first, but a small dose of *Tristram Shandy* does wonders in the way of warming up the subconscious mind." Then, seeing, I suppose, that I looked a bit forlorn, he gently raised my chin. "Head up, Clarissa," he declared heartily. "You and I are going to see this through together."

I tried to smile, but it was not much of an effort. I could not rid myself of the thought that until we could see what Mr. Treadgold called "the picture" much more clearly than was possible at present, the hand of suspicion rested heavily on the broad shoulders of Ronnie Barber.

Chapter Twenty-One

AT Arkwood all was still and cool behind lowered sun-blinds. As I crossed the hall, the butler emerged through the baize service door with a tray of glasses. "Where's everybody, Havilland?" I asked.

At the sound of my voice he started so that his tray jangled. The Arkwood butler was to me little more than a dignified presence hovering behind the footmen at meals or moving majestically about the rooms busying himself with shades or lights. He impressed me as being rather a stuffy person, his air was so solemn, his voice so hollow. "Sir Glenn and Miss Verge went off to the study after lunch, Miss," he reverberated, "and Mr. Clayden is out with the dogs. Her

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ladyship is not coming down to-day. Miss Rosemary was inquiring after you a while ago."

"She found us in the woods, thanks, Havilland. Has anything been seen of Mr. Wace?"

"No, Miss. I understand that Mr. Wace is indisposed."

"So they tell me. But hasn't anyone been down to see if he wants anything?"

He shook his head woodenly. "Mr. Wace don't care to be disturbed when he's laid aside. I've known him lie up in that cottage of his, it must be three days on end, and none of us see nor hair nor hide of him."

I sat down on the stairs and fetched out a cigarette. Havilland, putting down his tray on one of the marble-topped consoles, tendered me the flame of his lighter which rather unexpectedly he produced from his pocket—somehow, I could not exactly picture such a high and mighty personage enjoying a cigarette. "This is a bad business, Havilland," I remarked.

He sighed. "You may well say that, Miss. Fourteen years I served his late lordship *and* his lordship's father before him, and I never thought to see such goings on at Arkwood. But I'm getting out, thank goodness." His rolling tones became vibrato. "I have my dignity, I hope, and my reputation to consider, and I don't have to stay where I'm abused like a pickpocket, called out of my name . . ." He broke off. "I'm shore I beg your pardon, Miss."

I laughed. "You can say anything you like to me, you know—I don't belong here. What happened?"

"Words passed between Sir Glenn and Mr. Clayden at luncheon, Miss. Very 'ot, Sir Glenn was—I thought he'd do the other gentleman a mischief. When I stepped between them, the names he called me—in front of Miss Rosemary and Miss Verge, too! Miss Verge tried to 'ush him . . ." He trembled slightly. "I sent her ladyship my notice in writing just now."

"I'm terribly sorry, Havilland. I don't know how they'll all get on without you."

"Thank you, Miss. If you'll excuse me now . . ."

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But at that moment the front door, which I had left ajar, swung back revealing, to my surprise, Mr. Treadgold. "Good afternoon, Havilland," he said in his genial way. The butler thawed perceptibly. "Good afternoon to *you*, Mr. Treadgold, sir. Were you looking for Sir Glenn?"

Mr. Treadgold shook his head. "To tell the truth"—his manner grew confidential—"I've a touch of indigestion and I was wondering whether you couldn't let me have a little drop of something."

"Certainly, sir. A glass of brandy?"

"You don't happen to have any kummel?"

I felt my interest suddenly stir. "Kummel, Mr. Treadgold?" said Havilland, frowning his brow. "Dear me, sir, I don't believe we have such a thing in the house and, now I come to think of it, I don't recollect Sir Glenn ever stocking any. If it were crème de menthe now—her ladyship is partial to a glass, now and then, after dinner."

"Maybe, a drop of crème de menthe!"

"Yes, Mr. Treadgold. Directly, sir." Havilland bustled out. I looked at Mr. Treadgold—he had a happy, bubbling air. "What are you after now?" I asked. But his only reply was a mischievous glance. Presently the butler reappeared with the crème de menthe on a salver. "Thanks, Havilland," said Mr. Treadgold, and drained the glass at one swallow. "Definitely eupeptic," he commented, replacing the glass. "But it's not kummel. So you don't keep kummel at Arkwood?" he remarked dryly, wiping his moustache. "That's what you think! Just come out with me to the stables for a minute. I'd like to show you something." He extended his hand to me. "You come along, too!"

A slightly bewildered Havilland conducted us along some passages to a back entrance opening on an old world stable-yard with a belfry housing a big gold clock and horseboxes and what had evidently once been a great, rambling coach-house now turned into a garage. It was the hottest part of the afternoon and the heat rose shimmering from the flags: except for a black cat snoozing in the shade, we had the place to ourselves. Tramping stolidly ahead Mr. Treadgold

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led the way to the open doors of the garage. Just inside, some crates of empty bottles were stacked against the wall. On top of one of the crates a bottle lay crosswise and, as Mr. Treadgold picked it up, I saw the label. It was an empty kummel bottle.

He showed it to Havilland, who shook his head deprecatingly. "All I can tell you, sir," he averred, "is that I've sole charge of the cellar keys. It's part of my dooties to put out everything in the way of wines and liqueurs drunk in this house, and I never set eyes on that bottle before."

"How about the drink in Sir Glenn's study?" Mr. Treadgold questioned briskly.

"It all comes from the cellar, sir. Not a bottle of it as don't pass through my hands, the same as the rest."

Mr. Treadgold handed him the bottle. "Do you think you could ascertain where this bottle comes from?" He ran his finger over the surface. "It's not been here long or it'd be dusty like the rest."

"I can try, sir."

"On the strict Q.T., eh, Havilland?"

Where an American would have winked, Havilland bowed stiffly. "You may rely on me, Mr. Treadgold." Slipping the bottle in the pocket of his black tails, he stalked off gauntly and disappeared into the house.

I looked at Mr. Treadgold and burst out laughing. "How on earth did you spot it?"

"When I'm concentrating on any special phase of a case, I don't miss much," he answered, flattered. "Just now I'm focussing everything on that envelope of Mrs. Canning's. . . ." While speaking he moved towards his car that was parked in a corner of the yard. "Hop in!" he bade me.

"But where are we going?"

"To call on old Wace. Didn't I tell you I was concentrating on that envelope?"

I shrank back. "But he's been hitting it up ever since last night? He'll be definitely pie-eyed—he'll bite our heads off."

He laughed. "Not if you leave him to me. Pie-eyed or sober I can handle the old image. In you get!"

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We left the car at the Sedgwicke Arms and went through to Wace's by the door in the park wall, of which Mr. Treadgold had a key. The front door of the cottage appeared to be closed, but on my companion's smart rap the upper half swung back disclosing old Wace in bed, looking even odder than usual in an old blue *béret* crammed down over his ears and bright scarlet pyjamas. "Who the devil's that?" he called out, his face writhing.

"Hullo, Tris, you old skrimshanker," Mr. Treadgold exclaimed from the door. "What do you think you're doing, skulking down here?"

Wace scowled. "What concern is it of yours what I do?" he growled in a thick voice. He was not quite sober—that was evident enough; but his speech was no more incoherent than usual.

"Every concern," Mr. Treadgold retorted brightly. "Who knows but you might have been murdered, lying down here all by yourself?"

"Go away, will you? Get out of this. Can't you see I want to be alone?"

"Nonsense. You're not Greta Garbo. Besides, I've brought a young woman to call on you. . . ." So saying, he unlatched the lower part of the door and we went in. Wace glared at me. "Oh, it's you, is it?" he grumbled; but his tone was not unfriendly.

"Ye gods, what a frowst!" cried Mr. Treadgold. "Clarissa, open some of those windows, for goodness sake, and let's get the place in order!"

The cottage was in a terrible mess, with clothing trailing everywhere, the remains of a meal on the table and a litter of bottles—some whisky, some medicine—on the bedside table. Among the collection, incongruously enough, was a milk bottle half full. The air in the room was sour and stale. While I flung back the casement windows, Mr. Treadgold picked up the garments scattered about the floor and hung them over the back of a chair. I removed the tray of food to the little kitchen adjoining and was approaching the bedside table to tidy it when Wace, who had been

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mumbling to himself and throwing himself about in the bed, stopped me. "There's no more whisky there," he wheezed. "Since you're here, you can get me a drink. There's whisky in the wall cupboard behind you. You sit down," he commanded Mr. Treadgold, "and tell me what's new at Arkwood. What's the latest about Elvira Canning? Just why did she poison herself?"

I found a fresh bottle of whisky in the cupboard and opened it, and poured him a drink which, with a rather shaky hand, he filled up with milk. Mr. Treadgold was not very communicative, contenting himself with saying, in reply to Wace's question, that we should probably know more about Mrs. Canning's death after the inquest. As I cleared up the litter on the night table I heard Wace say: "She's a damned good riddance, if you ask me. Where did she get the stuff, hey? Did Glenn give it to her? I wouldn't wonder because he was getting sick of her—anyone could see that." He chuckled. "Did you hear me pin him down in front of that solemn ass from Scotland Yard? 'Are you going to tell him, Glenn,' says I, 'or shall I?'" He chuckled again. "You should have seen his face." He drank.

"I did," said Mr. Treadgold.

Wace laughed uproariously. "I staggered him, didn't I? Well, perhaps Glenn will come to his senses, now that she's gone. It should be a lesson to him—a man of his age falling for a baggage like that! Have they found out yet what was between her and this Danbury fellow? She and her crook of a husband were in this diamond robbery together, were they? And this cove Danbury tracks her down twenty years later to blackmail her, wasn't that the way of it?"

"Manderton's investigating that angle of the affair at present. Meanwhile, everybody at Arkwood is more or less under scrutiny."

Wace grimaced. "Not me!"

The other outlined a shrug. "That's up to the Inspector, I fancy."

There was a bellow from the bed. "But, damn it, I was away the night Danbury was murdered, and well Manderton

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knows it, because I told him. I was up in town for the Kolobangi meeting and I've witnesses to prove it—my sister at Wimbledon who put me up, the porter at my club, the Kolobangi secretary. If this blasted detective has the impertinence to doubt my word . . .”

Mr. Treadgold laughed. “Keep your shirt on, Tris. I remember now, of course—you were up in London that night and you didn't return until after lunch next day.”

Wace picked up his glass again. “You tell that thick-headed detective that if he makes libellous statements about me, he'll hear from my solicitor,” he rumbled.

“Shut up, you old devil! What a crotchety bloke you are! Manderton has made no accusations against you. On the contrary he told me you had a complete alibi, only I'd forgotten it.”

Wace applied himself to his glass. “How's Glenn taken Elvira's death?” he growled.

“Pretty hard, as you can imagine.”

“If he wasn't a damn fool, he'd know when he was well off.”

“I was wondering,” said Mr. Treadgold tentatively, “how long you had known Glenn Disford?”

“Five or six years.”

“What was he doing before he came to England?”

“Fruit growing in Oregon, I believe. He was there for years. He left America after the Wall Street crash of 'twenty-one.”

“Did he ever go to sea?”

“He might have, by the cut of his jib, but I wouldn't know except that, from one or two remarks he's dropped, he seems to have been pretty much all over the world. He never talks about his past life, to me or anybody else.”

“Do you think Elvira Canning was blackmailing him?”

Wace growled. “I wouldn't put it past her: all I know is that he was completely under her thumb. She was out to get him to marry her and if this Danbury business hadn't blown up, I believe she'd have pulled it off. If you ask me, Glenn's damn well out of it.”

“Then you don't know that she had anything on Glenn?”

His raucous laugh resounded. “If I did you may be sure

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I'd be the first one to pipe up. I've no reason to spare the dirty crook. When I tell you that he's just diddled me out of fifteen hundred pounds lawful commission, the low hound!" With a wrathful grunt he emptied his glass.

Mr. Treadgold wagged his head sympathetically. "Poor old Tris! I never thought he treated you too well, you know. Look at this place where he's put you to live—little better than a workman's cottage—with all those rows of rooms standing empty at Arkwood. Why, your secretary here is housed like a princess, compared with you. Aren't you, Clarissa?"

"I certainly have the loveliest room," I agreed.

"In the north wing, is it?" Wace asked.

"In the south wing," I corrected him.

"She has the green room, with the Zoffanys," Mr. Treadgold pointed out.

Wace emitted a grunt. "It's the first I've heard of their having any Zoffanys at Arkwood," he rumbled. "But there's nothing surprising about that. I'm not company, I don't get invited to stay. I'm just Glenn Disford's clerk, blast him, only fit to be sworn at and lodged worse than my own typist." With a gesture so sudden that it made me jump he banged his empty tumbler down so violently on the table beside him that the glass shattered. "Can't a man get a drink, by the Lord Harry?" he bellowed. In a panic I ran and fetched a fresh glass from the sideboard. "And give him one!" he ordered, pointing at Mr. Treadgold.

"No, thanks, old man," said Mr. Treadgold. "To tell the truth"—he patted his chest—"I've a touch of heartburn. If you had a little kummel or something of the sort . . ."

"It's rotgut! All liqueurs are rotgut!" Wace declaimed. "But if you really want the muck . . ." He pointed. "There's a bottle of kummel in that cupboard, girl, where you got the whisky."

I was aware of Mr. Treadgold's needle glance trailing me as I went to the cupboard. There were three bottles of whisky there, but no other bottle, and so I told Wace. "Idiot!" came in raging tones from the bed. "It's the bottle my sister

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sent me for Christmas—the blithering fool ought to know by now I never touch the filthy stuff. Get it yourself,” he bade Mr. Treadgold, “before this half-wit sends me out of my mind.”

Mr. Treadgold joined me at the cupboard. “There’s nothing but whisky here, Tris,” he announced.

“Hell’s bells,” Wace roared. “Glenn was here only a day or two ago and insisted on my opening the bottle for him. Of course it’s there. It was the day after the business at the Sedgwick Arms—I remember exactly because I’d just returned from town and Glenn dropped in on his way back from golf to hear about the Kolobangi meeting. He wanted brandy, but I didn’t have any brandy . . . Here, let me have a look.”

Flinging the bedclothes aside, he scrambled out of bed, a grotesque figure draped in a blanket, and came lurching over. “Why, the dirty crook!” he trumpeted when he saw the contents of the cupboard. “He must have carried off the bottle!” He exploded into a cackle of laughter. “If that isn’t Glenn all over! Anything he fancies, he must have!” He clapped Mr. Treadgold on the shoulder. “Well, Uncle Toby, you’ll just have to drink whisky. It’s better for you, anyway! Open up another bottle, girl!” And he staggered back into bed.

But, as was immediately apparent, Mr. Treadgold had decided to bring our visit to an end. Mr. Wace was now as loth to let us go as our welcome had been unfriendly. But Mr. Treadgold was firm about it and in a minute or two we found ourselves outside, leaving old Wace pulling faces and muttering to himself, mainly horrible imprecations against Sir Glenn and Manderton.

At the garden gate Mr. Treadgold glanced at his watch. “If you can put up with me a little longer,” he said, “I think I’d like to walk up as far as the house with you and see whether Havilland has any news for us. I can pick up the car later.”

We traversed the plantation and headed across the grass for the Prince Consort’s Walk with the high line of the Arkwood terrace beyond. “Weren’t you rather naughty, Uncle Toby, prodding the old guy like that?” I said. “I find his

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cottage charming and anyway, seeing how he lives, I guess he'd be pretty much of a handful if he stopped up at the house."

Mr. Treadgold grinned. "Well, he told us what we wanted to know!"

"I don't see that."

"It's quite clear that he doesn't know which room you're occupying at Arkwood, isn't it?"

I stared at him. "From what he said about those Zoffanys in my room is it?"

"Pardon me, from what I *prodded* him into saying, as you put it—you must allow me some method in my madness, my dear. It follows, therefore, that as he doesn't even know which your room is, he can scarcely have invaded it in order to steal that envelope, ergo, he's not the thief. Right?"

He looked at me challengingly, his eyes sparkling. "Uncle Toby," I said, "if you aren't the wildest old devil!"

He chuckled and went on: "Since he did not steal the envelope, he can have known nothing about its contents and therefore can't be suspected of having planted that wallet in order to incriminate Elvira. Which brings me to this matter of the bottle of kummel."

"I suppose he wasn't lying to us about it. Do you think Sir Glenn really carried it off?"

His face changed. "The implications arising from the answer to that question are so tremendous," he answered gravely, "that I can scarcely wait to hear what Havilland has found out for us."

Arkwood was as we had left it, quiet and deserted. Havilland was in his pantry, decanting a bottle of port. "I discovered who put out that kummel bottle, sir," he told my companion with a mysterious air, after first carefully closing the door. "It was Gladys."

Mr. Treadgold ruffled his nose. "Gladys? Gladys? Who the devil's Gladys?"

"A young person that works in the kitchen, Mr. Treadgold, what is commonly called a tweeny."

"And where did she get it from?"

"Her story is that she met Miss Verge yesterday afternoon

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outside the housekeeper's room. Miss Verge gave her the bottle and told her to throw it out."

"Miss Verge, eh?" said Mr. Treadgold musingly and turned to the door. "Well, thank you, Havilland, thank you very much."

"Was there anything else you wanted to know, sir?"

"Nothing further, thank you, Havilland!"

When we were alone together in the hall again, he looked at me cryptically. "Miss Verge, eh?" he repeated. Then with a brusque "See you to-night!" he strode out by the open front door and disappeared round the side of the house.

Chapter Twenty-Two

JUST the four of us—Laura Verge, Rosemary, Eric Clayden and I—dined together that evening. We did not dress—Rosemary, whom I met on my way upstairs after leaving Mr. Treadgold said we were not to change.

When I came down Laura and Eric were in the lounge. She appeared to be trying to pacify him. "But why can't I run up and see her for just five minutes?" he grumbled.

"Because she has to be kept quiet. Elvira's death came as a terrible shock to her."

"Those are Glenn's orders, I suppose?"

"They are."

"All right. But I warn you I'm not leaving this house until I've seen Marcy."

"Who said anything about your leaving, Eric?"

"Well, after the way he spoke to me at lunch, you surely don't suppose. . . .

"G.D. didn't mean any harm. But as you can imagine, all this business has got on his nerves."

"I should say it has! But does he have to take it out on me?"

"It's his way, and you must admit, you were pretty intolerable last night."

"He had it coming to him. After all, he's responsible

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for all this mess. If he hadn't brought Elvira down here in the first place . . ."

A spasm passed over Miss Verge's face. "Elvira's dead. Don't you think we might leave her in peace?"

"Is Laura sticking up for Glenn as usual?" said Rosemary, putting her head over the back of the chesterfield—I had not seen her sitting there. "Bring me a cocktail, Eric, and give Clarissa one! Good old Laura," she went on dryly, taking the glass Clayden handed her. "Where Glenn's concerned, she's a regular lioness defending her whelp!"

Miss Verge flushed. "G.D. can stick up for himself. You know as well as I do, Rosemary, that if anything goes wrong he's apt to fly out at the first convenient person. I'll take a small bet with you, Eric, that by this time he's forgotten all about the incident at lunch."

"*He* may have," Clayden remarked with significant emphasis, giving me my cocktail. At that moment Havilland came in, flustered. He spoke to Laura. "There are some persons outside, madam, asking for Sir Glenn. Newspaper reporters, they say they are. I spoke to Sir Glenn and he wants you to deal with them."

Rosemary had sprung up. She had gone very pale. "Laura!" she exclaimed aghast.

But Miss Verge was quite composed. "Where are they, Havilland?"

"In the hall, madam!"

"Show them into the morning-room. I'll see them there." She paused to drink up her cocktail and went quietly out.

Clayden helped himself to another drink. "I must say I take my hat off to our Vergie—she certainly copes. Do you know what I was thinking in my bath this morning?"

Rosemary, who was turning the pages of the evening newspaper, said cuttingly: "I can imagine nothing less interesting."

But he was not put off. "I was thinking that if Glenn had had any sense at all he'd have married her. After all he knew her long before he met Marcy, didn't he?"

"And what of it?" said Rosemary disdainfully. "She was only his secretary."

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He chuckled. "The office wife, eh?" He sipped his cocktail thoughtfully. "Has it ever occurred to you that Laura might be in love with Glenn?"

Rosemary ruffled her nose. "What rot! An old maid like Laura!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "She wasn't an old maid when she first met him twelve years ago. She dotes on him all right. I've often wondered whether, maybe, there wasn't once some little affair between them."

Rosemary sniffed. "Now you're being merely vulgar."

"Why? Such things have happened before. Perhaps it never struck you that our Laura is rabidly jealous of Marcy."

"Don't talk rubbish!"

"But is it rubbish? She hadn't any use for Elvira, either—you know that! Poor old Vergie, it can't have been much fun for her paying those dressmaking bills and settling the rent of Elvira's flat as I bet she had to. I was down for the Easter medal competition the week-end Elvira made her first appearance at Arkwood, and Laura didn't like it one little bit. And, as far as I was able to observe," he added, with a malicious glance at Rosemary, "you didn't, either!"

Rosemary flushed. "I never pretended to like Elvira. But it was nothing to do with Glenn. It was on account of Marcy."

He sniggered. "Was it altogether Marcy, darling? I wonder."

I did not care for the turn the conversation was taking, so struck in between them. "For how long had Sir Glenn actually known Elvira?" I asked Clayden.

"He only met her this year, when she came back from the Riviera—it must have been fairly early on because it wasn't long after he got his knighthood in the New Year Honours: she had a letter to him from somebody in the States, he told us. He asked her down here for the first time at Easter—she went with us all to the opening of the cottage hospital at Maiden Shapley that he presented to the county. She made quite a sensation on the platform, didn't she, Rosemary?"

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But Rosemary was sulking behind her paper. "How did Sir Glenn get to know Ronnie Barber?" I said.

He laughed. "That's what Manderton was asking this morning. He met him through Elvira—she brought him to Arkwood for a week-end."

"I didn't realize that it was Elvira who introduced him to Sir Glenn."

"Ronnie picked her up at Monte Carlo in the winter and ran across her again in London. As soon as Glenn discovered he was a plus-four man or something he invited him down." His eyes narrowed. "They were quite palsy-walsy, you know. They used to meet at that flat of hers in London, Manderton was telling us this morning." He laughed. "No wonder old Glenn was in such a rotten temper at lunch. La Canning seems to have had fairly promiscuous ways." He looked at me tentatively. "Rosemary thinks Ronnie poisoned her. What do *you* think?"

I felt myself redden. "I think it's a terrible charge to bring against anybody without evidence," I retorted as stoutly as I could.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm bringing charges against nobody. Ronnie claims that that bottle was planted on him." He paused, and added significantly: "For his sake I only hope it was."

Then Laura came back. At the sight of her Rosemary jumped up. "Well, what did you tell them?" she demanded sharply.

Miss Verge laughed softly. "As little as possible." She took her arm. "Dinner's ready. Let's go in!"

Mr. Treadgold struck me as being exactly the type of Englishman who may be relied on, invariably and in all circumstances, to dress for dinner. My hunch was a good one. As his man servant, who had fetched me in the car, ushered me into the sitting-room, there was Uncle Toby, his silvery hair smoothly brushed, looking no end of a dog in a Paisley smoking jacket with black lapels and very shiny pumps. The room was large and airy with a french window opening on a little garden separated from the golf course

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by a box hedge. It was growing dark outside and his man waited to draw the curtains and turn on the lights before noiselessly departing.

Mr. Treadgold was at his desk smoking a cigar. After greeting me he turned back to the desk and drew a sheet from a litter of papers and silently handed it to me. It was a photostat of the sailing list of the *Red Knight*. At the top was printed "*Red Knight*, 23,000 tons," followed by the names of the ship's officers:

Captain	Alexander W. Gooch
First Officer	J. W. Davy
Purser	Ronald Anderson

Then came the names of the first class passengers. Against the "M's" a line had been drawn in ink. My eye ran down the column:

Maastricht, Dr. Pieter
Manasseh, Sir Julius and Lady
Miss Manasseh
Master Manasseh
Nurse
Mandelbaum, Mrs. J. J.
Maid
Milton, Miss Mary
Monk, Mr. and Mrs. R.

I sighed as I gave him back the photostat. "Poor Elvira! It would have been lots better for her if she'd been drowned with her scamp of a husband!"

His nod was sombre. "Isn't it tantalizing to reflect that, somewhere in this long list, a name may lurk, one of that handful of people snatched from the sea that night, who could give us, if we could only lay hands on him or her, the true story of what happened in the purser's office when the vessel struck? Brig Galbraith is dead, Anderson, if we are to believe his employers, is likewise dead, Woodman is dead, and now Elvira Monk has gone the same way. And, seeing

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that twenty years have elapsed since the disaster, probably most of the survivors are also in their graves by this. Somewhere, in a locked cupboard, a skeleton is hidden. Is that cupboard at Arkwood? If so, who shall give us the key?"

He slumped into a reverie and with his hands folded behind his back, his cigar stuck out at an aggressive angle from his mouth, he began to pace the floor. He stopped suddenly in front of me. "Would you recognize that envelope Elvira Canning gave you if you saw it again?" he demanded.

"I think so. It was white and square and rather stiff."

He pointed at the desk. "In the paper stand there you'll find envelopes of various shapes and sizes. Will you pick out one that resembles as nearly as possible the size—the colour and quality don't matter—of that envelope of Elvira's?"

I went to the desk. There were all kinds of envelopes in the paper stand, large and small, oblong and square—the idea occurred to me that he had collected an assortment for my especial benefit. Some large square buff envelopes appeared to me to be nearest in size to the sealed envelope. I held one up and he took it from me. Then, opening a drawer of the desk, he produced a battered wallet. I recognized it immediately as Danbury's. "I persuaded Hendersley to lend it to me when I saw him before dinner this evening," he explained. "Now watch!" He slipped the wallet into the envelope I had selected and licking the flap, gummed it down. He handed me the envelope. "Now, tell me," he said, oddly tense, "does that look or feel like that envelope of Elvira's?"

I felt the envelope, weighed it in my hands. "No," I said, "it doesn't although it's much the same weight. It doesn't because the wallet doesn't fit. There's a gap and it bulges. But that other envelope had no bulges."

"That's because the wallet is oblong, but the envelope is square. To contain the wallet without a bulge—that's to say, without an empty space along its upper half—you'd want an oblong envelope, do you follow me? In other words, if you're right in claiming that Elvira's envelope was square and showed no bulge, then it's virtually certain that it didn't contain the wallet."

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"It was square and it had no bulge like this—I'd swear to that."

"Then in assuming that Elvira's envelope contained Danbury's wallet you were mistaken?"

I surveyed him blankly. "Well—I suppose I was."

"Thanks, my dear!" Taking the envelope from me he tossed it back, sealed up with the wallet inside, into the drawer he had opened and locked the drawer. He pulled up a chair. "Sit down!" With an air of relief he followed suit. I said: "All the same she *did* give me an envelope to keep for her, you know. If it didn't contain the wallet, what did it contain?"

His gaze was austere. "But she told you that herself, when she pressed that envelope on you—she said it contained papers which she did not want to go astray. Didn't she go on to add that everyone was against her but that nothing could happen to her as long as that envelope was in a safe place? Who specifically was threatening her at Arkwood? For the moment we are restricted to surmise, but what appears most probable is that in that envelope were the means to neutralize that threat, in other words, some papers or other so compromising for her enemy that as long as they were in safety the latter could do nothing against her."

He made a break. "Shall I tell you something?" he went on presently. "I'm virtually certain in my own mind that, whoever killed Danbury, it wasn't Elvira Canning. To begin with, there are good grounds for believing that *she never had that wallet* as is demonstrated, I submit, by the experiment we've just conducted and corroborated by the rather clumsy attempt to incriminate her by means of the wallet wrapped in her handkerchief. Do you follow me?"

"I think so."

"Look at it in this way! The only evidence against her is, one, the fact that she and Danbury were survivors of the *Red Knight*, and, two, the wallet found concealed in her scarf. Whatever the secret link between her and Danbury may have been, you'll admit that if the envelope she entrusted to you didn't contain the wallet, a legitimate inference is that the

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wallet was deliberately planted to fasten suspicion on her. Are we entitled to go a step further and contend that the person who planted the wallet is the one who carried it away from the scene of the crime in order to hinder identification—in other words, Danbury's murderer?"

He flaked the ash from his cigar. "As to who that is," he continued, "we're still groping in the dark so that my question must remain for the moment unanswered. We've traced the kümmel used to saturate that scarf back to Disford and ultimately to Miss Verge. At present, however, it's impossible to say whether our friend Laura was acting as Disford's agent or whether the whole business of this false clue did not spring from Elvira's general unpopularity at Arkwood, though in the latter event the question of where the wallet came from has still to be explained. You must have seen for yourself that Mrs. Canning had more enemies than friends at Arkwood?"

I nodded. "She certainly had. Rosemary, Laura Verge, the Clayden boy and I guess, Lady Disford herself—they were all against her. And, of course, old Wace. . . ."

"That she had some secret hold over someone at Arkwood, whether Disford or somebody else, I think is clear; but whether it had any connection with the *Red Knight* affair . . ." A dubious headshake completed the sentence. "No doubt the contents of that envelope of Elvira's would go far to clear up the mystery; but unfortunately it has disappeared, and our prospects of tracing it seem to be more than remote. Let's therefore pass to the circumstances of her death and see what we can glean from them."

He took a reflective whiff of his cigar. "Who wanted to be rid of her? Disford, if what Wace told us is true, in the first place and after him, the wife. . . ."

"My gracious, Uncle Toby, you're not suggesting . . .?"

"I'm suggesting nothing—I'm merely thinking aloud. Next in order, for various motives, come Rosemary and young Clayden, out of loyalty to Marcia, and Laura—how do we classify her?"

"She was wrapped up in Glenn, Eric was saying to-night.

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If she thought Elvira was blackmailing him . . . Eric declares she was jealous of Elvira—of Marcia, too."

He drew on his cigar. "I dare say he's right." He took a slip of paper from his pocket. "Manderton has jotted down a note of the whereabouts of everybody between the hours of seven-thirty and eight-thirty last evening covering the period during which she died and he let me make a copy." He hemmed, running his finger down the paper. "Barber we know about already and you and me we can leave out. Tris is out, too . . ."

"Tris?"

"As it happens, I'm his alibi. I was in the tap at the Sedgwicke Arms last evening at about a quarter past seven when he appeared, already changed—he had come down to fetch the evening paper. We had a couple of drinks and got yarning until we discovered it was close on eight-thirty. As he didn't want to be late for dinner, I drove him as far as the house."

I nodded. "That's right. I remember, he was in the lounge when I came down."

"That leaves Disford, Lady D., Rosemary, Eric and Miss Verge. Here's Disford!" He read out:

" 'Sir Glenn Disford. Left study at 7.5 and joined bailiff, Murchison, waiting for him in main hall. Went round farm with Murchison until "about 7.30" (Murchison). They parted at the copse behind the lake where Sir Glenn wanted to inspect some clearing that was going on. Murchison went to his house in the village for supper and Sir G. returned to Arkwood (own statement). In bedroom attached to his study dressing at 8.15 (footman). Appeared lounge 8.25 (butler).' "

Mr. Treadgold raised his eyes from the paper. "Some gaps there!" he commented and read on:

" 'Lady Disford. Returned from Sale of Work at Undercoombe at 6.30 (chauffeur). In small morning-room until

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she went up to dress (own statement). In her bedroom dressing at 8.10 (maid).

" 'Miss Wreith and Mr. Clayden. Returned from swimming about 7.5 and went to their rooms (own statements and butler). Both remained upstairs (own statements) until dinner gong. Appeared in lounge within few minutes of one another—about 8.35 (butler).

" 'Miss Verge. Was with Sir Glenn on terrace until he left "about 7" to go round farm. Remained there "for about twenty minutes," then walked in flower gardens below terrace until dressing gong at 8 then went to her bedroom to dress (own statement). Descended dining-room to inspect table 8.20 (butler).' "

"Not very conclusive," Mr. Treadgold commented, restoring the paper to his pocket. "By this almost any of 'em could have been down at the lake between half-past seven and eight, the crucial period."

"Not Rosemary or Eric, because they were back from their swim soon after seven."

He grunted. "They could have gone back, couldn't they? There are more ways out of Arkwood than by the front door."

"They're saying, those two, that Ronnie poisoned Elvira," I remarked rather miserably.

He placed the tips of his fingers together. "And not without a certain amount of justification. After Glenn Disford, he was her closest friend at Arkwood; he mixed the cocktail that caused her death, and he was apparently the last person to see her alive. If you add to all this the fact that the bottle of cyanide with which she was poisoned was subsequently found in his possession. . . ."

"But, Uncle Toby, if he really poisoned her, why on earth should he have kept that bottle? Wouldn't his first instinct have been to drop it in the lake or something?"

His nod approved me. "You've put your finger on the spot that's been troubling me. In truth, I see no reason why young Barber, if he was the murderer, should have kept the

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bottle. On the other hand, I find excellent grounds for the murderer, if it was *not* Barber, doing so."

"You mean, in order to implicate Ronnie in the crime?"

"Exactly."

"But it's too horrible!"

For a moment he brooded, smoking placidly. "I've been trying to reconstruct the scene in my mind. It was known that Manderton was coming to Arkwood to question her. We don't know what her secret was but it must have been obvious to anyone directly threatened by it that there was a considerable risk of her giving something away. Time was pressing and for anyone on the look-out for the chance of getting rid of her the moment was unique."

He paused to get rid of his ash. "Rosemary and Eric, having finished their swim, returned to the house. Mrs. Canning remains alone at the bathing place. It was the custom at Arkwood to have cocktails after a late swim before dinner—a shaker and glasses and the necessary ingredients were kept in the pavilion. This was the murderer's chance—let's call him 'X'. X has the cyanide and, knowing what has to be done—maybe, over a friendly drink—approaches. But an unforeseen development occurs. Barber is down at the lake. He chats with Elvira as she splashes about in the water, mixes her a drink. X is in a fix. Elvira and Barber are pretty intimate: may she not, under Manderton's imminent arrival, have blabbed to Ronnie; let out something about Danbury's murder, shall we say? Therefore, to make all sure, Barber had to be incriminated and that was why that bottle wasn't thrown away. Do I make myself plain?"

I shuddered. "Too plain."

He wagged his head. "All criminals make mistakes, they say. X doesn't seem to have realized that the one sure way of exculpating Barber was by planting that bottle on him."

"I suppose you're certain it couldn't have been suicide?"

"Why should she have wanted to commit suicide? Didn't you say she was present when you told Disford about Manderton coming up after dinner to see her? Well, how did she take it?"

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"She didn't bat an eyelid!"

"Exactly. Because she had the ball at her feet. She was sure of her position. She was out to marry Disford and she could have told Manderton any old lie, knowing that whatever she said Glenn would have to back her up. And as soon as this Danbury business had blown over she'd have collected back her envelope from you and hey, for the registrar's office!" He shook his head. "It's tragic about that envelope! The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that it holds the key to this whole business. I suppose you've no idea who could have got in to your room in your absence and taken it?"

I shook my head. "It's always open—anyone could walk in. The only one of the men who's ever been in there as far as I know is Eric Clayden. He strolled in on Rosemary and me when we were getting ready for bed the night I arrived."

"Clayden, eh? And he'd seen Elvira hand you that envelope? Has he never questioned you about it?"

"No."

He grunted. "That in itself is a suspicious circumstance. There was no love lost between him and Elvira, was there?"

"I should say not, but chiefly on account of Marcia, as I told you."

"Quite, and the contents of that envelope, if they are what I suspect them to be, would be the right ammunition for the neglected wife. . . ."

His voice trailed away. I said: "Weren't there some notes you wanted me to type?"

He stirred from his reverie. "Yes." He was looking at me absently. "About Barber," he said, "did you tell him about that envelope of Elvira's?" I shook my head. "Did he ever speak to you about Elvira?"

"Not really. He was always pretty evasive about her."

He snorted. "The damned young idiot! He should have stayed and faced the music."

Following a sudden instinct then, I told him about Ronnie, about his repeated attempts to get me to leave Arkwood, his mysterious nocturnal ramblings about the house. Mr.

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Treadgold let me talk, leaning back in his chair, his head enveloped in a blue cloud of cigar smoke. "Well, Master Ronnie knows something, that's clear," he commented when I had finished. "But what? The only link between him and the successive stages of the case is the fact that his firm audits the books of the *Knight Line*. Was there anything between him and Mrs. Canning, do you think?"

"Well, they used to meet at her flat in London. . . ."

He nodded. "Yes. Manderton discovered that." He paused. "Oddly enough, the keys of her flat are missing." He paused again and shook his head. "I wonder what possessed the young fool to make a bolt for it. He's bound to be caught, you know—Manderton will see to that. Maybe, if he is mixed up in this business, he's just as well out of the way." His face had grown suddenly grave. "You'll want to mind yourself, Clarissa. There's a killer loose. Don't go out alone after dark, and keep your door locked at night."

I gazed at him in astonishment. "You're not serious, Uncle Toby!"

He made a little determined movement of the head. "Ay, but I am. I've handled cases like this before. The question always is, Who will be the next to be struck down?" He raised his head sharply. "Listen! Did you hear a noise?" He pointed towards the window. "Outside, in the garden."

I listened. "I don't think so."

"Quiet!" Even as he whispered the command he was on his feet and in two noiseless strides had gained the light switch beside the door. As the room was plunged in darkness I heard beyond the window the squeak of a gate.

"Stay where you are!" My companion's burly form thrust through the curtains and disappeared. Disregarding his warning, I followed after. The moon was not yet up, the night dark and spangled with stars. At the gate leading on to the links Mr. Treadgold peered right and left across the rolling fairway.

Without speaking he ushered me back to the house, turned on the lights again and went to the telephone. I heard him ask for the Arkwood number. It was the footman, Charles,

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who answered. Mr. Treadgold asked if any of the party were out. "Miss Pell?" I heard him say. "And who? Oh, Mr. Clayden—he took the dogs for a run. Nobody else? Miss Rosemary—yes, I expect she's with her ladyship."

He hung up. "Did they know you were coming down here to-night?"

"Why, yes. I mentioned it at dinner."

"Was Eric there?"

"Yes, he was."

A volley of barks echoed from outside. We ran to the window. A figure was dimly visible at the gate, hushing the dogs: "Down, Rumpus! Shut up, Roy!" It was Clayden's voice. Then he stepped into the bar of light that streamed from the room. "I thought I'd better let you know, Uncle Toby," he remarked in his nonchalant way. "There was a prowler in your garden just now. As I came over the rise back there, by that copse beside the eleventh green, I saw a figure over the hedge at that window behind you, listening."

Mr. Treadgold grunted. "Humph! Have you any idea who it was?"

"Not the foggiest. I don't even know whether it was a man or a woman because I only saw the upper half, silhouetted against the white of the house—the hedge cut off the rest. Unfortunately, I had that damned Rumpus on the lead—you know the way he likes to dash after rabbits—and at that particular moment he jumped away and the lead caught round my legs and almost had me over. When I looked again I couldn't see anything. Even the house was dark."

"That was because I heard someone outside and turned off the light." Mr. Treadgold looked at me inquiringly. "I think you'd best be getting back now."

"But your notes?"

"Some other time. We'll walk back across the golf course with Eric."

"I'm quite capable of seeing Clarissa home, Uncle Toby," Clayden observed, "or do you think, by any chance, I might abduct her?"

Mr. Treadgold smiled. "You might do worse, my boy

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But I'll stroll back with you—a breath of air will do me good."

For all his jocular manner, I had the impression that he did not trust Clayden and had no intention of letting him see me home alone. I was just as pleased—the prospect of wandering across the dark and deserted golf links with a young man whom I disliked more and more, the more I saw of him, did not attract me. So I surrendered myself gratefully to Mr. Treadgold's protective arm. No harm, I knew, could come to me as long as Uncle Toby was with me.

Chapter Twenty-Three

EVENTS had moved so fast since my arrival at Arkwood that it was not until I woke up next morning and remarked an unusual stillness in the house that I realized the day was Sunday. It was not much after seven and a lovely morning so on a sudden impulse I decided I would go to early church. Without waiting for Cox to appear I scrambled in to my clothes and, as there was nobody around when I came downstairs, set off by myself for the village. I went by way of Wace's cottage and the Sedgwick Arms, and, realizing when I reached the door in the wall that I had no key, left the door ajar so that I should be able to return the same way.

Burstowe Church was a dusty, decrepit old place with a dusty, decrepit old clergyman. A bare handful of villagers was present and the only person I recognized was Dr. Hammond in one of the front pews with a woman in a weird hat whom I took to be his wife. As I had no desire to be pumped concerning recent events at Arkwood I left at the end of the service before they could see me.

Walking back to the Sedgwick Arms a car overtook me. I recognized the Arkwood Rolls. As it whirled by I had a glimpse of an elderly man in glasses inside, who was neither Sir Glenn or Mr. Treadgold. I watched the car and as I saw

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it turn off past the inn to take the road to Arkwood, caught myself wondering who the early visitor might be.

The door in the park wall was still ajar when I reached it. As I neared Wace's cottage a spiral of smoke mounted from the chimney in the still morning air. In the garden a stout woman in a sun-bonnet was cutting lettuce. I stopped at the hedge and spoke to her. "How's Mr. Wace this morning?" I asked.

She straightened herself with an effort and wiped her brow with a brown and brawny elbow. This, I realized, must be Mrs. Cutting, who lived in the village and "did" for Mr. Wace. "Not to tell you a lie, missie," she puffed, "'e's been right queer these past couple o' days. But 'e's sleepin' now. I thought as 'ow 'e'd relish a couple o' heads of lettuce for his lunch, the pore gentleman 'im bein' that partial to rabbit food." She chuckled. "Did 'ee want 'im for anything special, lovie?"

"No. If he wakes before you leave, just tell him Miss Pell was inquiring."

I went on up to the house. On the terrace Clayden, immaculate in butcher-blue shirt and grey flannels, was eating a grapefruit at a table under one of the sun umbrellas. "You look hot," he observed, waving his spoon.

"I've been to early church."

"The car was down in the village to fetch Sir Andrew. You could have saved yourself a walk."

"Who's Sir Andrew?"

His spoon delved into his grapefruit. "Sir Andrew Cromartie, the Harley Street specialist, golfing pal of Glenn's. He's spending the week-end with the Farrars, the other side of Burstowe, so Glenn had him over to take a look at Marcy."

"Marcy? She's not seriously ill, is she?"

He shook his head. "Not that I know of. It's this fainting spell she had the other night. Glenn's pretty fussy about her, you know. I expect he wants to make sure her heart's all right. Don't you want to have some breakfast?"

"It's so hot. I think I'll have it inside."

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"Please yourself!"

I passed on indoors. In the dining-room Rosemary was breakfasting alone. "Hullo, Clarissa!" Her tone was even more listless than usual. "The coffee's freshly made. Ring if you want anything."

"Just a cup of coffee will do for me." I poured myself a cup and took it over to the table. "Eric was telling me about this specialist who has come to see your sister," I said, sitting down beside her. "I do hope it's nothing serious."

She shrugged her shoulders sulkily. "He's with her now. Marcy's all right. She's as strong as a horse."

"Maybe, that's why Sir Glenn got worried when she fainted the other night."

"Maybe. Have you got a cigarette?"

I gave her my case and at the same time noticed, out of the corner of my eye, the empty cigarette pack and the little pile of stubs, lipstick reddened, in the ashtray beside her. It was on the tip of my tongue to say that the one who wanted medical attention was not Marcy, but Rosemary. I found her looking dreadfully ill. There were dark shadows about her eyes as though she had not slept and her hand trembled as she lit her cigarette.

"What you and I ought to do," I said, "is to get out and play a few holes of golf." But she shook her head stubbornly. "You could do with a little exercise and fresh air," I persisted. "It would take your mind off things."

"Nothing will do that," she answered darkly. She clenched her fist. "What are the police for?" she cried. "Why doesn't that damned Manderton do something? Why hasn't he cleared up this Danbury business? If Elvira was poisoned, why doesn't he arrest somebody? Why haven't they caught Ronnie?" She swung to me. "What about your friend, Treadgold? They all say he's so clever: hasn't he any theory to put an end to this ghastly uncertainty? What has he to say about Ronnie? If Ronnie's as innocent as you make out, why did he run away? How do you explain that?"

Her vehemence left her shaken and breathless. It took me considerably aback. To recover myself I lit a cigarette.

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"If Ronnie were here to speak for himself," I said, "I'm sure he'd be able to explain everything. I don't know why you're so down on him."

Her face contracted—I thought she was going to cry. But her tone was hard and bitter as before. "I'm not down on anybody, as you call it. It's just that I can't go on living under this strain—none of us can. Have you seen Glenn? He looks ten years older, and he's drinking too much. And Marcy—what do you suppose it does to her every time she looks at him? She won't talk about it, but I know how she's suffering, deep down underneath, and I can't bear to see it." She seemed to take a deep breath. "To-morrow's the inquest on this wretched Elvira, and we'll have to go over the whole damnable, heart-breaking business again. Elvira's dead, isn't she? She brought nothing but sorrow on this house, so why can't they bury her and get it over with?"

I tried to soothe her, but she threw me off. "Oh, for God's sake, leave me alone!" she cried and, pushing back her chair, dashed from the room.

I was on the terrace listening to the one o'clock news on the portable radio I had brought out from the lounge when Laura Verge came out. I asked about Lady Disford and she replied quite cheerfully that Sir Andrew had made a thorough examination and that his report was entirely satisfactory—all she required was rest. At that moment the name of Elvira Canning struck upon my ear. Simultaneously the two of us swung to the radio whence the unctuous B.B.C. tones came rolling:

"The inquest on Mrs. Elvira Canning, who was found drowned on Friday night in mysterious circumstances at Arkwood, Burstowe, Somerset, where she was staying as the guest of Sir Glenn and Lady Disford, has been fixed for to-morrow. This is the second tragedy which the little Somersetshire village has witnessed within a week, for last Sunday night an unknown assailant stabbed to death an ex-steward called Woodman at the local inn. Inspector Manderton, of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard, who is in charge of the investigation of the

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Woodman murder, was in London yesterday, but returns to Somerset to-day. He declined to express any opinion as to whether the two tragedies are connected. Arkwood, the former seat of the Earls of Sedgwick, is one of the show places of the county. Sir Glenn Disford . . ."

A voice spoke behind us. "Oh, Laura, please . . ."

Miss Verge whipped about, then her fingers flew to the switch. Marcia had come from the house. At first glance she struck me as being her normal self, poised and self-possessed and charmingly pretty in a cornflower-blue flowered silk with a bunch of scarlet poppies at the breast. But as I studied her more closely I was aware of what I can only describe as a "brittle" air about her, a kind of fragile tenseness that hinted at a constant effort to keep her nerves under control. Even now, as though to bridge the silence that fell as the announcer's voice was abruptly cut off, she made quite a business of putting on the large floppy hat she carried, surveying herself in the glass of the french window hooked back against the house. She murmured something to me about hoping I was being looked after properly.

Then with a shout of "Marcy! This is wonderful!" Clayden came rushing up from the gardens. Quite regardless of Laura and me he went up to her and took her two hands. "I've been thinking so much about you," he said. "I'm so glad to see you down again. My gracious, Arkwood's a different place without you." His eyes were shining and he seemed to have shuffled off all the affectation that customarily annoyed me. Gently Marcia detached her hands, but her face had softened. "You say the sweetest things, Eric," she told him. "It's nice to be missed!"

I was aware that someone had come from the house. I turned. It was Rosemary. She was watching the scene with a sort of bitter scorn, such a lonely, unhappy thing. Then Havilland announced lunch.

It was a depressing meal. Neither Sir Glenn or Rosemary uttered a word—the rest of us had to carry on the conversation. As I glanced at Sir Glenn I could not help thinking of what Rosemary had told me about him. His face, barred

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with the heavy moustache, was morose: all his habitual exuberance of spirits seemed to have evaporated.

We had reached the dessert course when the explosion occurred. By tacit consent, the four of us, upon whose shoulders rested the burden of the conversation at table, had avoided all mention of the events that were uppermost in our minds. Marcia was telling me about the shooting parties they had in the fall and asked me if I had visited the coverts. I was not very clear what the coverts were, but I told her I had walked in the woods with Mr. Treadgold.

At the sound of his name Sir Glenn laid down his fruit knife and looked up with a scowl. "Has that fellow been round again?" he snarled, glaring at Laura. And before I could speak he went on: "I won't have that damned tailor snooping here. There's a sight too much gossip in the village as it is and now with those blasted reporters trying to break in here . . ." He broke off and cast black glances about him. "The next time this Treadgold chap pokes his nose in at Arkwood, he's to be shown the door, do you understand, Laura? D'you hear me, Havilland?" he barked, turning his head to the butler who was removing the plates. "That's an order!" His glare travelled to me. "And that goes for you, too! If you and I aren't to fall out, just you give Mr. Nosey Treadgold a wide berth!" With that he rose up from the table and strode out.

One of the footmen saved the situation: Mr. Wace was asking for me on the telephone. Rejoicing at this providential release I ran out to the hall. I was hoping he had some work to give me: even my old ogre's mumblings and bellowings were preferable to the increasingly sultry atmosphere at Arkwood. His voice was surprisingly mild on the wire. Would it be convenient for me to come down to the cottage without delay?

Would it be convenient to get out of that house of tragedy if only for an hour? Would it be convenient? Oh, boy, oh, boy!

Mrs. Cutting had done a whole job on the cottage. The

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windows were open, the clothing removed, the litter of whisky bottles cleared away, the ash-trays emptied: there was even a bowl of stock on the sideboard. Old Wace was still in bed, but the bed was no longer crumpled and he had changed into clean blue pyjamas under a black silk dressing-gown. He looked wan and old: the jug of lemonade beside the bed suggested that he had reached the hangover stage.

He said feebly: "Good girl. I knew I could rely on you. I was pretty terrible yesterday, hey? But you know how it is with me."

I nodded. "I guess I do, Mr. Wace."

He pulled a grimace. "You're a sensible girl. Uncle Toby wouldn't like you if you weren't. Good chap, old Toby. Have you seen him to-day?"

I shook my head. He grunted. "I've got to get hold of him." He pointed to the telephone beside the bed. "Burstowe six-one. There was no reply when I called before. See if you can get him now." I gave the exchange the number and heard the bell whirring; but no one answered. "Still no reply apparently," I said.

Old Wace was frowning and making faces to himself. "Hell!" he murmured under his breath. He screwed up one of his eyes, surveying me out of the other. "Are you to be trusted with a secret?" he rumbled.

"I think so."

"I've something for old Treadgold. He ought to have it as quickly as possible. Will you give it to him for me?"

I hesitated, thinking of the scene at lunch. "Is it important?"

He grunted. "So important, if it's what I think it is, that it might be the means of solving the Danbury murder." His eyes, sunken and bloodshot, ferreted in my face. "But if you undertake this commission, no messing about, mind. You'll have to go to his house, find out where he is, root him out, never rest till he has it in his hands. . . ."

"I'll do it!" I said.

He glanced across the room. "Just see that there's nobody hanging about outside."

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I went out into the garden and came back. "All clear," I reported.

"Then shut the door and come here!"

Back at his bedside he said to me: "Put your hand under the pillow and bring out what you find there!"

I obeyed and came away with a knife in a leather sheath. It was a long thin knife with a battered bone handle and the sheath, of black leather, was greasy with wear and stained with red earth. Wace took the knife from me and unsheathed it. Along its entire length the blade was rusted in great gobbets, purplish red. "That's a seaman's knife," he explained. "All seamen carry knives like this. I spent two years of my life before the mast when I was a youngster, and I had one, too." He ran a nubbly finger along the blade. "See those rust stains? Do you know what they are? That's blood—human blood." His eyes rolled almost gleefully.

I drew back in horror, gazing at the knife. "Blood?" I echoed. "Are you sure?"

He emitted a great guffaw. "By the red-hot elephants of hell, if you'd knocked about the world as I have, it wouldn't be the first time you'd seen a knife that has killed a man, no, not by a long chalk." His manner grew confidential. "Mrs. Cutting, who looks after me, found that knife this morning alongside the lettuce patch in my garden out there. It was driven into the earth under the hedge with only the hilt showing—originally, it was probably plunged out of sight but the rain may have washed some of the top soil off." He gazed at me mischievously. "When I tell you that the hedge where she found it is slap up alongside the path leading from the Sedgwicke Arms to Arkwood . . ." His features writhed. "What d'you think of that? Hey? Hey?"

I stared at him. "You mean, it's the missing knife, the one that killed Danbury?"

He chortled exultantly. "Ay, that I do. The murderer had to get rid of it somewhere, so what does he do but bury it right under my hedge alongside the path leading past my cottage?" He lowered his voice impressively. "And shall I tell you why he chose my garden? Because he knew,

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as everybody at Arkwood knew, that the cottage was empty that night, as I was up in town, so that there was no chance of his being disturbed."

He beckoned me closer with his head. "Now look here!" He took the sheath and rubbed it on the sleeve of his dressing-gown. "Can you see that there are two initials there, burned in the leather with a hot wire?" His finger pointed.

"'R.G.,'" I read out.

"R.G. it is!" he proclaimed triumphantly.

"But who's 'R.G.'? There's no one with those initials at Arkwood."

He chuckled. "Never mind. That's for Uncle Toby to nose out." He sheathed the knife and put it in my hands. "Find him as quickly as you can and tell him what I say."

"But if I can't locate him? This is an important clue—shouldn't Inspector Manderton have it?"

He fairly trumpeted with wrath. "That solemn ass! Old Treadgold has more brains in his little finger than that jumped-up peeler has in the whole of his head." He goggled at me. "You do as you're bid, d'you hear? And if you're really so feeble-witted that you can't run Uncle Toby to earth between this and to-night, bring that knife back to me! Go on, girl, get going!"

I got going then, though with the cold feeling at the pit of my stomach that I was being horribly rash in thus defying Sir Glenn's ban. I thought I would make a start by calling at Mr. Treadgold's bungalow and with many qualms, praying that I should encounter none of the Arkwood players, made my way across the links, in and out of the Sunday golfers. I reached the bungalow unchallenged, but found it silent and deserted. I was standing in the porch with my finger on the bell when I saw a plump individual in shirt sleeves coming down the road between the hedgerows bright with dog roses.

It was Mr. Treadgold's man. "The gov'nor's out," he told me. "He was off in his car first thing and won't be back till late."

"Oh, dear," I said. "I suppose you don't know where he's gone."

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"That I don't, miss. But if it was urgent . . ."

"It is—it's very urgent!"

"He did speak of calling on Inspector Manderton at Maiden Shapley on his way back. If you were to phone him at 'The Pheasant' at about nine to-night . . ."

With that I had to be satisfied. The knife was like a dead weight in my handbag as I trudged back to Arkwood, wondering how I should ever manage to pass the time until evening.

Chapter Twenty-Four

LAURA VERGE answered the question for me. She met me in the hall. "Oh, Clarissa, there you are," she said. "Look, I wonder if you'd help me out."

"Of course, Laura!"

"Lady Disford has some letters she wants to get off by the last collection in the village at six. I usually do her letters for her, but G.D. is clamouring for me. Do you think you could come to the rescue?"

"Surely. Let me just fetch my notebook—it's in my bedroom."

Marcia Disford was at her desk in the small morning-room, looking quite business-like in horn-rimmed specs, her cheque-book at her elbow and a mass of letters and bills spread out over the large silver-bound blotter. She thanked me prettily for coming to her aid and helped me to draw up a chair. We got down to work at once. Her letters were all to do with the housekeeping or her social activities and mostly in the third person: "Lady Disford would be glad if Messrs. Fortnum and Mason would forward six tins of the small Abernethy biscuits as before"; "Lady Disford would like Madame Blanche to send her three jars of the No. 3 Regina face cream"; "Lady Disford thanks the Rector of Muggridge for his letter about the charity bazaar on the 27th and will be glad to take charge of the lace stall with Mrs. Adamson"; "Lady Disford begs to enclose a donation of three guineas

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for the Maiden Shapley Bowling Club"; "Lady Disford will be pleased to be one of the patronesses of the Hunt Club Ball". She obviously had a tidy mind—she dictated clearly and well. As my pencil followed her I found myself forming a mental picture of her as a leading local personage, to be wooed, entreated and courted, and consulted on all important events in the neighbourhood. If she was still under the influence of strain as I had seen her before lunch, she had herself under control now—as the heap of letters before her grew smaller and the pile of torn papers in the waste-paper basket mounted. I had the feeling that she had flung herself into this activity as a diversion from the black cloud that hung over the house.

I must have taken down a round dozen letters when she paused and said: "I think that's all I need trouble about to-day. Oh, dear," she went on vaguely, "you'll want a typewriter, won't you? You'd better use the machine in my husband's study. If he's in his room, you can get Charles or somebody to bring it over and type my letters here. I'm going to my room to lie down." She gave me the cheques she had written, and a pad of the Arkwood note-paper with envelopes, locked her cheque-book away in the drawer of the desk and stood up. Contemplating me she said: "Surely you're looking very pale?"

I had a guilty feeling, thinking of that knife in my bag that lay not a foot from her hand. "I guess it's the heat," I told her. She was silent for a moment, rubbing her fingers meditatively along the silver edging of the blotter. "We're all living on our nerves just now," she said in a low voice, "but it's hard luck on you." She glanced up and her eyes through her clustering lashes swept my face. "Don't you think my sister looks very ill?"

I nodded. "I do, indeed, Lady Disford."

"I want her to go away for a change. But she won't hear of it—she has another ten days of her holiday to run. If you think she'd listen to you . . ."

I shook my head. "She wouldn't, if you can't persuade her."

"You Americans are so—so definite. You have such clear

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minds. You always know what you want. You're like that, Clarissa—Glenn—my husband—noticed it at once. I thought perhaps if you'd have a word with Rosemary . . ."

"It wouldn't do any good, I'm afraid. Your sister may not be an American, but she certainly knows her own mind."

She dropped her hand with a sort of helpless gesture. "That's her right, of course. She's so independent—she's always been like that. Even now, when she could live here with us or have a little house on the estate, she prefers to slave away at that wretched book-shop of hers on a measly three pounds a week, or whatever it is."

I smiled. "That's American, Lady Disford. She learned to think like that in America."

"She's entitled to live her own life, I know that. But when she wants to run mine . . ." She broke off. "You know, before—that's to say, before I married, Rosemary provided for mother and me when she was working in America and we were in London, and she still thinks she can tell me what to do." She checked again. "Now she wants me to send Eric away, to break with him." She looked up with a defiant air. "Well, I won't do it and so I've told her. You know, she never liked Eric. She's jealous of him. Don't you think she's jealous of him?"

"Really, Lady Disford, I wouldn't know."

"You know all right," she answered darkly, "because everybody knows it. Rosemary may not realize it herself but she can't stand the sight of Eric because he's in love with me, or thinks he is. Rosemary means well and she's been a terribly good sister to me, but she seems to resent anyone else paying me the least little attention—even Glenn, I sometimes think. I'm sorry for Eric—you know, I didn't treat him very well. We were practically engaged at one time—that's to say, before I met my husband—and . . . Oh, I know, most people don't cotton to Eric because of his sharp tongue, but he has a brilliant and original mind and I like to have him about—I'm used to him, I suppose. After all," she went on almost plaintively, "things aren't always so easy for me as they seem and I must have someone to

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confide in, someone who understands me and whom I can trust. Sometimes, during these past weeks, if it hadn't been for Eric . . ."

She stopped there but I knew she was alluding to Elvira. I said nothing and she went on: "You know, Clarissa, it's pretty lonesome for me here in many ways. Glenn has Laura and Rosemary—Laura to fuss over him and Rosemary to keep me in order; but I have nobody, nobody except Eric."

I could not help thinking of Rosemary, poor, jilted Rosemary, and I spoke up boldly. "You have your husband, Lady Disford," I said.

She gave me a long, strange look. "Oh, yes, I have my husband," she answered. Then gathering up her glasses and her fountain pen she said: "If you'll give those letters to Havilland when they're done he'll send them up to me to sign. And thanks again for helping me."

I found Sir Glenn alone in his study. He was smoking a cigar in one of the club chairs with a drink, flanked by a bottle of whisky and a syphon, on a low table beside him. I found him rather frightening, his face was so angry and so congested. I said: "Excuse me, Sir Glenn, but Lady Disford has given me some letters and she said I might borrow your typewriter."

He waved his hand to where under its cover the typewriter stood on its own little desk. "Help yourself," he growled. I was lifting the typewriter to carry it away when he rumbled at me again. "You can use it there, can't you?"

"If it won't disturb you, Sir Glenn."

I had to take an irascible grunt for a sign that I was to stay. Opening my notebook, I sat down at the machine. For a while the tapping of the keys and the splashing of the fountain in the court outside were the only sound. Suddenly Disford said: "What do you think of my missus?"

I looked across at him in surprise. "I think she's very lovely," I answered.

He nodded. "Ay, there are not many like her about. And she has style, eh? There's a girl worth spending a bit

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of money on. But I didn't mean her looks. What do you make of her as a woman?"

I blew some eraser marks off my paper. "Really, Sir Glenn, I don't know that I've ever thought about it."

He gave me a cross look. "Oh, yes, you have. You've a pair of eyes in your head and you know how to use 'em, I'll warrant. She's not much like that sister of hers, you'll grant me that, at any rate?"

"I suppose they are different types."

"You betcha. My wife has the looks for one thing. Then again with her a chap can always tell what she's thinking. But not with the other one, eh?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know anything about it. I only know that Rosemary's tremendously devoted to both of you."

"That may be. But she thinks she can boss her sister around. Well, she can't. I'm the master of this house and I intend to remain so. I had a bit of bother with Laura when I was first married and brought Marcy down here as mistress of Arkwood and wife of one of the most important men in the county; but Laura learned to accept the situation, so why can't the other one?" He gave a guffaw. "It may be hard luck on Rosemary, but under the law of England a fellow can have only one wife, you know!"

I felt the blood rush into my cheeks with indignation, he was so crude about it. Then I saw Miss Verge standing in the doorway: I wondered how long she had been there. With her usual brisk air she said something to Disford about some cables she had sent off for him and with a sense of relief I returned to my typing. They talked for a bit about various commissions she had done for him and he gave her some instructions, by which time I had reached the last of my letters. Then I heard him say: "Where's Marcy?"

"She went upstairs to lie down," Laura replied.

"Is Rosemary with her?"

"No. I haven't seen anything of Rosemary since lunch."

He emptied his glass and stood up. "I'll be with Marcy if anyone wants me."

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Miss Verge hesitated. "Don't you think she'd better rest? Didn't Sir Andrew say she had to be kept quiet?"

"I shan't disturb her."

"You can sit with her after supper. Let her sleep now. It would be much better if you went out and got a breath of fresh air."

"I don't want to go out."

She was looking at the whisky bottle. "You can't stay indoors all day in this weather. Why not take Clarissa and me for a stroll through the coverts before supper?"

"I'm going up to Marcy, I tell you!" His surly tone was a danger signal but she ignored it. "But, look here, G.D. . . ." she began.

"How many times have I to tell you to mind your own damned business?" he broke in. "I'm sick of your trying to order me around, as I've told you before. You get down to writing that letter to the income tax commissioners we discussed and attend to your job and leave my wife to me, d'you hear?" His face suffused with anger, he slammed out of the study and we heard his heavy tread reverberate into the distance along the corridor.

Laura Verge stood there as if turned into stone. As I drew the last of my letters from the typewriter I said: "Why do you put up with it?" She did not speak. "Did you hear what he said about Rosemary?" I went on.

She nodded. "About you, too?" I asked. She nodded again. "Do you have to stand for it?" I said. "After all, with your experience, you can always get another job."

As I spoke I saw a tear slide down her brown and wrinkled cheek and splash unheeded on the lapel of her jacket. "It's not that," she answered in her gruff voice. "I've often thought of leaving him but somehow I never could—not even when he brought his young wife down here. You see," she went on shyly, "I'm used to him and, well, even with all his faults, he means a great deal to me. He's the only man I've ever known well, the only man I've been able to help and well, cherish a little. You know, with all his success and all his money, he's a lonely creature, really, without a single real

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friend except me to appreciate him for what he is and not for what can be got out of him. I don't want to say a word against Marcy. But you've seen her and I'll ask you one question: If Glenn Disford had been a poor man, do you think she'd have looked at him twice? Rosemary's another matter. Rosemary's in love with him, or used to be, and if he'd married her, things would have been very different."

I shrugged my shoulders as I gathered up my letters. "I can't make you out, Laura. You've wasted years of your life on this man and all you get is insolence and abuse. You're an intelligent person yet you let him make a doormat out of you."

She had taken her handkerchief from her bag and blew her nose with a forlorn air. "Perhaps I don't understand it myself. He was only just starting operations in London when I joined him twelve years ago and we were in the thick of things together, in bad times as in good. He was an inspiration in those days, always willing to take a chance, never cast down, always a fighter, a gambler, perhaps, but a bold and shrewd one. I was a young woman then and I found him, well, dazzling—he was so much more vital, so much more the leader, than any man I'd ever met. He had his fits of temper and we had our fallings out; but he was kind and generous to me and now, when maybe my usefulness to him is over, I cannot help feeling grateful to him, deeply and tremendously grateful, for giving me twelve wonderful years."

She replaced the handkerchief in her bag and shut it with a snap. "Now I must write to the income tax," she said, her old brisk self once more. "And you'd better get those letters up to Lady Disford—she'll want to sign them in time for the post."

I put my arms about her and kissed her weatherbeaten cheek. "Dear Laura," I said, "you're one in a million. The perfect friend. Eric says that Sir Glenn should have married you, and he's absolutely right."

She gave me her warm smile. "Ah!" she remarked enigmatically as she sat down at the typewriter.

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Chapter Twenty-Five

THERE were telephones in various parts of the house at Arkwood, but the main instrument, the one on which I had spoken to Inspector Manderton two evenings before, was an antiquated affair with a handle affixed to the wall in what they called "the games room," a place of raincoats and fishing tackle and golf bags and guns that opened off the entrance hall. It was within easy reach of the library and my plan was, as soon as I could conveniently get away after dinner, to slip off to the library and there await a chance to telephone Mr. Treadgold.

As it happened the Sunday arrangements at Arkwood favoured my plan. There was a cold buffet supper at half-past seven for which, following the usual English custom, people did not change and at which the servants did not appear. We waited for Rosemary and when there was no sign of her, sat down without her. It was still light when we rose from the table after another dreary meal. Sir Glenn clumped off in silence to his study leaving his wife with us on the terrace. Marcia and Eric chatted: Laura sat apart with her knitting. I dawdled over my coffee as long as I could, then told Laura I thought I would go to the library and find myself a book. She glanced up from her knitting with a smile. "Well," she said, "there are plenty to choose from."

It was just on half-past eight—I had half an hour to spare before calling Mr. Treadgold at Maiden Shapley. Dusk was falling in the library, but it was still light enough in the alcoves under the windows to read. I chose an alcove at random and after a little browse along the shelves, took down a tall volume, parchment-bound, entitled, *Compleat History of Arkwood, in ye County of Somerset, Seat of ye Rt. Honourable Robert Earle of Sedgwick*. The wood-cuts with different views of the house and the park were quaint, but I soon found my attention wandering. My book gave off a musty smell that blended with the prevalent library odour of worm-eaten

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leather: in the mood I was in that evening the faint mustiness seemed to me to be part of the slow process of corruption lapping unseen at the foundations of Arkwood and all it stood for. The darkness deepened, but I did not turn on the light, sitting there in my big oaken chair with the volume on my knee, letting my thoughts drift.

R.G.! What could those initials stand for? R. for Ronald and G. for Glenn, was as far as I got, and it made no sense. Yet R.G. must be looked for at Arkwood. Everything pointed to it—Laura Verge's cape; the knife buried beside the path the murderer had almost certainly used, going and coming; the knife itself, carrying us one step nearer that "tang of the sea" which Mr. Treadgold had so uncannily discerned to be clinging to the crime. As I thought of the path winding through the trees past Wace's cottage to the Sedgwicke Arms I found myself reflecting that in reality it ran back to a December night, twenty years ago, when, amid the howling of the storm and the roar of breakers, the waves smashed the great liner to her end.

What part did Ronnie Barber play in all this? He was only a child when the *Red Knight* went down. How then did he fit into the picture? The darkness that gathered in the corners of the library was no thicker than that which baffled all my attempts to answer that question. Had he been in love with Elvira and did some lover's quarrel, with no bearing or perhaps only a remote bearing on the *Red Knight* mystery, lie behind her death? I found myself almost wishing that he would fall once more into Manderton's clutches so that I might know the truth about him.

The sound of the library door opening aroused me from my day dreaming. Then the light went on. I heard Rosemary's voice, nervous, agitated. "Come in here," she said. "We'll have this out now."

"But I'm not up to it, I tell you"—it was Marcia speaking and her tone was almost tearful. "I want to go to bed!"

"I shan't keep you long. If you'd rather I had it out with Glenn. . . ."

The door closed. I was on my feet in a panic. This was

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eavesdropping. It would be awkward, but I should have to disclose myself. I heard a sharp gasp. Marcia said: "Oh, Rosemary, you didn't—you couldn't?"

"I did," came her sister's rejoinder, harsh and defiant. "So what are you going to do about it?"

I came out then. Rosemary stood against the centre table, her head flung back, her hands behind her. She was still in the slacks she had worn at lunch, and they were dusty, with burrs sticking to them, as though she had just come in from a walk. Marcia, her eyes brimming, her hands clasped tightly in front of her, was facing her. She was white to the lips. I said: "I was back there in the alcove, reading. I don't want you to think I was listening. I'll go back to the lounge."

Rosemary had whipped about. She gave me a look cold with anger. Then she caught her sister by the arm. "Come up to my room!" she said almost fiercely and without another glance in my direction, fairly ran her from the library.

I gave an "Ouf!" of relief. They had left the library door open. I glanced at my watch. Heavens, it was a quarter past nine! I listened. Not a mouse stirred. I switched off the light and crept out. The lounge corridor was deserted and from the lounge itself, no sound. The baize door that led into the main hall squeaked protestingly as I opened it and I paused for a moment in a panic in the dusky hall—the big hanging lantern had not been lit. But no one came and the next moment I was in the games room, furiously turning the pages of the slim local telephone directory by the flame of my lighter. Ah, here it was—"The Pheasant", Maiden Shapley 8.

I should have liked to have shut the door of the games room. But I decided against it—it would look suspicious if anyone should come. I gave the number and waited there in the dark, and when "The Pheasant" replied, there was another long wait while Mr. Treadgold was fetched. At last, with a thrill, I heard his comforting basso. "Uncle Toby," I said, "it's Clarissa. I've got to see you at once."

"That's not going to be so easy," he boomed back. "I'm

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waiting for Manderton: we've a lot to talk about. Wouldn't to-morrow do?"

"No. It's something old Wace wanted me to give you."

"Wace?" His tone was slightly disapproving. "What is it?"

I glanced over my shoulder. "I don't know whether I should say over the phone."

His voice grew testy. "Well, my dear, it's not very convenient to-night. I don't know how long Manderton is likely to be. Can't you be a little less mysterious?"

I risked another backward glance. "It's the knife, the one that Danbury was killed with," I said, lowering my voice.

"Speak up! I can't hear you. The what?"

I put my lips closer to the mouthpiece. "I'm speaking from the entrance hall at Arkwood and I don't want to be overheard. It's the knife Danbury was killed with. It was buried in Wace's garden."

"And you have it?" His tone was excited now.

"Yes."

"Bring it over to my bungalow at once. I'll meet you there. And, Clarissa . . ."

But I did not let him finish. There was someone in the hall. Not the firm ring of heels was the sound that had sent the blood draining from my heart, but a stealthy footfall creaking across the flagged floor. I hung up in a panic and tiptoed to peer out into the dim, high vestibule. But even as I crept forward I heard the squeak of hinges that had frightened me before and realized that somebody had passed through the baize door connecting the entrance hall with the lounge corridor.

I dared not explore further. For a full minute I stood stock still, my handbag containing the knife clutched tightly to my side. My first feeling was one of resentment against Mr. Treadgold. If he hadn't been so dumb about letting me see him . . . But my sense of irritation passed quickly. By this time he was on his way to the bungalow and, anyway, in view of what had happened, the sooner the knife was out of my possession and in his hands, the better. I hesitated no longer, but opened the front door and slipped outside.

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It was pretty dark out of doors but I knew that, by following the drive to the left as it curved round the house, I should eventually come to the big cedar opposite the quadrangle whence it was a straight line across the grass to the shrubbery that skirted the golf course beside the eleventh green. Actually in the full of night I failed to identify the shrubbery among the masses of trees all about and lost a certain amount of time wandering about until I came up against a wire fence which proved to be the fence enclosing the golf links. I crawled under the wire and saw, not a hundred yards away, the cream walls of a house rising above the hedge, and recognized Mr. Treadgold's bungalow.

As I came to the garden gate I perceived that the sitting-room window was open and that a little radiance shone through the drawn curtains on to the flagged path. My spirits rose—Mr. Treadgold was already back. I swung back the gate and ran up the path. At the same moment I was almost blinded by an orange flash out of the darkness and felt at the same time a tremendous blow that knocked me headlong. I went down with the roar of a report singing in my ears.

The next thing I knew I was lying on the settee in Mr. Treadgold's sitting-room with a wet towel on my forehead. Someone was trying, not very successfully, to loosen my frock from my shoulder. I was feeling very muzzy and the face that was peering into mine kept going out of focus. It should have been Mr. Treadgold's face, but when it stopped sliding about, it wasn't Mr. Treadgold. It was Ronnie Barber's.

Chapter Twenty-Six

"**W**HAT happened?" I asked.

Now that my senses were returning I saw that it was Ronnie all right: the mere sight of him gave me a feeling of security. It seemed to me that his expression was different. He looked absolutely shattered without a trace of his normal air of self-assurance about him. He said in

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a strangled sort of voice: "Oh, darling, I thought you were dead. When I saw you lying on the path out there . . ."

I smiled up at him. "Don't look so scared. I'm all right. There was a shot, wasn't there?"

He nodded, staring at me as though he had never seen me before. "Who was it?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I saw no one: all I was out to do was to get you indoors as quickly as possible, out of harm's way. I went outside after I'd brought you in, but whoever it was who fired at you had disappeared. Have you any idea who it could have been? Were you followed?"

"Someone was listening when I was telephoning to Mr. Treadgold from Arkwood to-night, I'm pretty certain; but I didn't notice anybody following me as I came across the park. Last night, too, when I was down here with Mr. Treadgold, someone was prowling about the garden."

"It sounded like an automatic by the report." He was trying to disengage my frock from my shoulder. "Can you do anything about these damned straps? You're bleeding, you know."

I put my hand up and saw blood on it. "They plugged you all right," he said, "but I don't think it's serious. Let's have a look!"

I pulled the zipper and loosened the front of my dress, slipping my shoulder free. He had towels and a basin of water on a chair. "Does it hurt?" he asked, sponging my shoulder.

"It aches rather."

"You're probably bruised. The other's only a graze. It's not bleeding so much now, but I'll leave the wet towel on until Uncle Toby turns up. He might have some mercuri-chrome."

I sat up abruptly. "My handbag!" I cried in a panic.

He jerked his head sideways. "On the table there!"

"Give it to me, please!"

He fetched the bag. With a beating heart I opened it. Thank goodness, the knife was still there! I snapped the bag shut. He was still staring at me disconsolately. "Ronnie," I said, "where on earth have you been?"

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He ran his hand over his thick black hair. "In London."

"Are you stopping with Uncle Toby?"

He gave me a fleeting smile. "If he'll harbour a fugitive from justice. Where is he?"

"On his way over from Maiden Shapley. Ronnie, what are you going to do?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Tell Uncle Toby my story and see what he can suggest." His dark eyes appealed to me. "I didn't poison Elvira, Clarissa, though I know that appearances are against me."

"I never believed you did."

His face lit up. "Truly?"

I nodded. "But I thought it was crazy of you to run away."

He looked down, smoothing out the pleat of his trousers. "I didn't poison Elvira," he said, "but I did steal her keys."

"Her keys?"

"I'd often tried to get hold of them before, but she never let them out of her possession. While I was talking to her down at the lake on Friday evening I suddenly saw the bunch lying on the grass—they must have fallen out of her bathing bag. There were two keys in particular I wanted—the key of her London flat and the key of the safe in her bedroom there. The reason I went over to Maiden Shapley that night was to have those two keys copied—my idea was to let her have the bunch back before she missed it—but unfortunately I couldn't find a locksmith open. I returned to Arkwood so as not to arouse suspicion, intending to go up to town first thing in the morning. But when I got back Elvira was dead and then the police detained me."

"But I don't understand. Was there any special reason why you wanted her keys?"

He nodded. "It was on account of something she said to me down at the lake that evening—something I didn't tell Manderton. She said she wasn't afraid of him, that nothing could happen to her unless certain people wanted a bomb-shell to burst under their feet—a lot of veiled threats, all pretty mysterious. 'If they think they can get tough with

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me,' she said, 'I can get tough with them, and I've got the material laid away in a safe place to do it with.' And just then, as though by a miracle, I spotted those keys of hers!"

Naturally I thought immediately of the envelope she had given me. "But, Ronnie . . ." I broke in.

"You'll understand," he went on, disregarding the interruption, "that I wasn't going to let Manderton or anybody else stop me from making the most of such a heaven-sent opportunity as that. So I broke out of 'The Pheasant' and caught the milk train to London. I was at her flat before nine, but I might have saved myself the trouble. There was nothing in the safe except some jewellery and some insurance papers and, though I ransacked the place, I could find nothing anywhere else."

I looked at him. "That was because most probably I had the papers or whatever it was you were after?"

"You, Clarissa?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"You remember that bangle of hers you saw on the table at Wace's cottage the other morning?"

"Yes."

"She gave me that for undertaking to look after a sealed envelope for her."

He sprang to his feet in wild excitement. "A sealed envelope? But, Clarissa, don't you see, it must have contained this material she spoke of? For pity's sake, why didn't you tell me before? Where's that envelope? What did you do with it?"

"I haven't got it. Someone stole it from my room."

"Didn't you open it? Didn't you see, at least, what was in it?"

"How could I do that? It wasn't mine to open."

With a sort of groan he sat down on the couch again. "If this isn't the last straw!" He buried his face in his hands.

"I might have told you about it if you'd only trusted me. But you were always so mysterious."

He sighed. "I suppose I ought to blame myself really. How's the shoulder?" He looked about him. "Where does Uncle Toby keep the whisky, do you know? I think you should have a tot."

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"I don't want any whisky. I want you to tell me just why you were so interested in Elvira Canning."

He pawed the back of his head and eyed me tentatively. Then he said slowly: "For the past nine months I've been investigating the *Red Knight* diamond case for the Knight Line. You see, Ronald Anderson, the purser, was my uncle. . . ."

I stared at him. "Your uncle?"

He nodded. "That's right. He and my mother were born and raised in Fife on the estate of Lord Clanannan, the head of the Line. Anderson was a special protégé of Clanannan's and the old boy flatly refused to accept the assessors' contention that Anderson must have had something to do with the robbery and, indeed, that he was still alive. When the story cropped up again with the salvage of the empty safe from the wreck and they discovered that a professional cracksman had been on board the *Red Knight*, passing under the name of Monk, Clanannan sent for me—he knew all about me as my firm are auditors to the Line—and gave me *carte blanche* to try and clear Anderson's name. I was quite willing because mother and Aunt Jean, Ronald Anderson's widow, had been terribly upset by all these stories flying about. The only clue I had to work on was Elvira Monk, and we didn't know whether she was still alive. I spent months trying to trace her, first in South Africa and then in the States, until I finally got a line on her last January down at Palm Beach where she'd been living under her maiden name of Canning. She'd recently sailed for Europe and I caught up with her at last at Monte Carlo."

I laughed. "Well, if you aren't the dark one!"

He cocked his head. "Not half as dark as she was, believe me. Not a word could I entice out of her about the *Red Knight* or this scallywag husband of hers, and I didn't dare let on that I knew anything about her past for fear of scaring her away. I played up to her properly and it was a whole time job; let me tell you! Lunches, dinners, theatres . . ."

"And visits to her flat?"

He veiled his eyes. "That, too." He paused and went on

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slowly: "I know you believe I was in love with her, or even, perhaps, that she was in love with me; but, believe me, it wasn't the case. She was restless, and she hated to be alone. She liked to have someone around when she wasn't with Glenn—someone to talk to, to squire her about. Clarissa," he said very earnestly, "a woman like that could never fall in love, because she was in love with herself. And she was as hard as nails." After a little break he resumed: "Of course, the moment I heard about Danbury I realized that the only person who could have killed him was Elvira. But even then I couldn't induce her to betray herself."

"Why didn't you tell Manderton at once that she was a survivor of the *Red Knight*?"

His air became dogged. "I'm not a detective. I didn't care who killed Danbury—my job was to discover how those diamonds vanished from the *Red Knight*, and I'd no intention of allowing Manderton to give me away to Elvira just as the scent was getting warm. Remember, I was only a kid when my Uncle Ronald disappeared on board the *Red Knight* and I was never absolutely sure about him. The thought in the back of my mind was that if he were still alive somewhere, Elvira might lead me to him."

"I suppose there's no chance that Glenn Disford . . ."

He shook his head. "Not an earthly. I've been into all that. Glenn's a bigger man altogether and dark; my uncle was a different type, short and thick-set, with fiery hair and a temper to match, my mother says."

"But, Ronnie, it's perfectly evident that she had some hold over Glenn—what she told you down by the lake, and that envelope she gave me, are the proof. Have you no idea what it was?"

"Her tale to me was that Glenn was merely the gentleman friend who would marry her as soon as he got his divorce. But I suspected there was more to it than that—once or twice I heard them rowing in the study at Arkwood, after the rest of you had gone to bed. I had an idea that he might have been an associate of her husband's or that he'd had a hand in disposing of the diamonds. But there's no evidence of this."

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"Is there nothing in their past lives to suggest any connection between them?"

"Not a thing. Glenn's record is pretty sketchy and goes back no farther than nineteen twenty-five when he had a pearling trawler off the Australian coast; but neither in his record nor hers, so far as I've been able to trace her movements since the wreck, is there anything to show any former association between them. And the Knight Line records, which I've been through pretty thoroughly, give the same negative result." He shook his head dolefully. "It's a stymie, Clarissa," he said, "and Uncle Toby's now my only hope." He held up his hand. "Isn't that a car now?"

The throb of an engine was audible outside. I struggled to my feet. "Ronnie, he was waiting for Manderton," I exclaimed. "If Manderton is with him, what are we going to do about you?"

He made no answer, staring at me almost fiercely. "To blazes with Manderton!" he said and, well, I don't know how it happened, but the next moment, just as I was, with one shoulder all bare and bloody and my front sopping with water, I was in his arms and he was kissing me and I was clinging to him desperately, swept by such gladness as I had never known. It was only Mr. Treadgold's ponderous tread in the hall outside that drove us apart.

My heart jumped when I saw that he was alone. He looked harassed. "Good God, Clarissa," he cried at the sight of me, "what's happened? You're wounded."

"Someone in the garden took a pot shot at her with an automatic as she arrived," said Ronnie. "But it's only a surface wound. She'll be all right when she's patched up."

Mr. Treadgold frowned. "Have you any idea who it was?" he asked me. I shook my head. His eyes clouded over. "One might make a guess!" He turned to Ronnie.

"There's a medicine chest in my bedroom. Get it, would you?" He shook his head at me as Ronnie went out. "I warned you to be careful. I tried to warn you again on the telephone to-night, only you hung up. I was going to tell you to get one of the chauffeurs to drive you over."

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"That wouldn't have done, I'm afraid," I replied laughing. "You see, Sir Glenn has ordered me to have nothing to do with you. He says he won't have 'that damned tailor' as he calls you, snooping about the place. . . ."

Mr. Treadgold went crimson and made gobbling noises. "He said that, did he? So I'm a damned snooping tailor, am I? I'm a tailor, and proud of it, but I don't snoop." He snorted. "I'm not surprised that he's afraid to meet me . . ." He broke off. "But, here's Ronnie! Now let's have a look at that shoulder of yours."

He strapped me up very scientifically with lint and adhesive plaster. While doing so he said to Ronnie: "Guess where I spent the day!" and went on, "At old Clanannan's at Ascot. You probably don't know that we've made clothes for him for years. He told me all about you."

"No!" I cried. "Then you can explain everything to Inspector Manderton. Can't he, Ronnie?"

"I've done that already," Mr. Treadgold put in. "I had a very interesting day with his lordship. He showed me a collection of old photographs of Captain Gooch and other members of the ship's company of the *Red Knight*."

Ronnie nodded. "I know about those photographs—he got them together at my request. But they don't take us anywhere."

"How's that?" Mr. Treadgold asked me, stepping back to survey his bandaging. "That's fine," I told him and slipped my shoulder back into my dress. Mr. Treadgold had resumed his conversation with Ronnie. "I wouldn't quite say that," he remarked mildly. "Does the name of Groper, 'Conky' Groper, convey anything to you in connection with the *Red Knight*?"

Ronnie laughed briefly. "I don't know about the 'Conky' but a man called Groper was assistant purser. He was lost with the ship."

"Quite. Did you ever study his photograph in that collection of Clanannan's, old man?" He smiled. "Because if you had you'd realize why he was known as 'Conky.' I have the photo with me. Let me show it to you."

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With that he drew an envelope from his pocket and took from it a small photo which he held out for us to see. It was a head and shoulders print of the usual passport order, taken front face and hatless, showing a solid-looking man, clean-shaven, with an alert, rather vulgar expression and a remarkably large nose. It was almost a Cyrano nose, high-bridged and jutting—as Mr. Treadgold remarked, pointing to it with his finger “a regular conk.” “Now you see, perhaps, why they called him ‘Conky’?” he observed to Ronnie.

With blue eyes roving from one to another of us: “Does this chap remind you of anyone in particular?” he asked. “I can’t say it does,” Ronnie replied, and I concurred. Mr. Treadgold hid the nose with his little finger. “Now?” he questioned.

I shrugged my shoulders. “I know what’s in your mind,” I said, “but I don’t see any resemblance. He’s the same type as Sir Glenn with eyes set rather close together and a square chin. But beyond that . . .”

Mr. Treadgold was quite unperturbed. “It’s the nose,” he declared, “that lends character to the face. There’s a famous chapter on noses in *Tristram Shandy*, but,” he added, hastily, catching my eye, “we won’t go into that now. What I wished to observe is that there are few more effective means of altering the appearance than by changing the shape of the nose, and, as you know, thousands of such nose operations are carried out every year. Plastic surgery developed during the last war as the result of Sir Harold Gillies’s work in patching the faces of disfigured soldiers and in the post-war period, when that photograph was taken, tremendous strides were made. Looking at that photo at Lord Glanannan’s this morning I asked myself, if I were ‘Conky’ Groper, and I wished to change my appearance, what would be the first thing I’d do.”

He broke off, surveying the two of us with heightened colour and eyes sparkling with zest. “I’d have my nose operated, you’d say, wouldn’t you?” he ran on, “and you’d be dead right. And then, if I were clean-shaven I’d grow a moustache especially if I were in the service of a British

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passenger line, where moustaches are taboo. Well, I thought it'd be interesting to see what 'Conky' Groper would look like if that thumping big proboscis of his, as it appears on that photo, was reduced to reasonable proportions and a moustache added. I happened to remember that a customer of mine, who draws heads for the illustrated papers, lives at Sunningdale. So, on leaving Glenannan's, I popped in on this chap and got him to re-draw that photo, fitting it with a nose that I described to him and sounding it off with a moustache. And here's the result!"

He turned to his envelope again and brought out a pencil sketch which he held out silently for our inspection. Ronnie broke the silence. "My God!" he murmured in an awed voice. I looked up from the drawing to Mr. Treadgold. "It could be," I told him.

Mr. Treadgold's expression was adamant. "At any rate," he announced in bell-like tones, "the resemblance is sufficiently striking for Manderton to have gone to Arkwood to-night at my suggestion to ask Sir Glenn Disford one simple question: What do you know of Ray Groper, better known as 'Conky' Groper, assistant purser of the *Red Knight*?"

"Ray Groper?" said Ronnie. "Yes, that was the name. I remember seeing it in the list of ship's officers."

A sudden light flared up in my mind. I snatched at my handbag, opened it and extracted the knife. I held it out to Mr. Treadgold. "That's the knife that was buried in old Wace's garden," I told him excitedly. "Look at the initials on the sheath!"

With a rapid "Ah!" Mr. Treadgold took the knife. He glanced at the letters burnt in the leather of the sheath and I saw his face change. Baring the rusty and blood-stained blade he examined it rapidly before resheathing it. He lifted his gaze to mine, his eyes like steel points, his very moustache bristling. "By gad, we've got him!" he said in a tense undertone.

The telephone, suddenly shrilling into the quietness of the house, startled us. Mr. Treadgold went to the desk. For a second or two he stood there, the receiver to his ear. Then

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he said impassively: "Tell the Inspector I'll be along at once!" and hung up.

For a long moment he was silent—I could tell by his expression that something had happened. When he spoke, he was brief. "It's about Disford," he said hoarsely. "They've just found him dead in the Prince Consort's Walk. He's shot himself."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

WE set off for Arkwood at once. Mr. Treadgold insisted on taking us with him in case Manderton wanted to question us. If my shoulder troubled me, we'd go by car: otherwise, since we were likely to find the Inspector in the Prince Consort's Walk, to go on foot by way of the golf course would be quicker. I assured him I was all right, Ronnie gave me his arm and we started out, across the links.

I was struggling against an overwhelming sense of foreboding. To be frank, I would as lief have stayed behind, so fearful was I of what awaited us at Arkwood, so borne down by the impact of this latest tragedy. This, I realized, was the final dénouement. We were about to learn the truth about Danbury and Elvira, and such intangible figures as Brig Galbraith and "Conky" Groper that hovered ghost-like about the wreck of the *Red Knight*. But, about to come face to face with the truth, I found myself dreading it and could have wished that Mr. Treadgold had left me at the bungalow.

We trudged in silence across the dew-soaked fairway. It was a night in keeping with my mood, elusive with moon-glare and clinging mist. The moon was a yellow disc slung low on the horizon and glittering through the trees, making lacework of the foliage and, as we emerged into the park, bathing with silver the dark shapes of oak and boulder that studded slope and dell. A thin mist lent everything a pastel greyness, blurring all outlines and peopling low ground and hollows with spectral shapes. It was a night on which one

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could fancy erl-kings, and were-wolves, and vampires, and all manner of evil things, to be abroad, free to skulk behind its pallid gauze, a night of clammy silence broken only by the eerie gobblings of the cranes down by the lake and the squawk of a brown owl crossing our path.

As we topped the rise and saw below us the great house on its mound looming up in the moonlight among its cluster of gardens, and greenhouses, and dependencies, I found myself thinking of Glenn Disford. He was gone, but Arkwood with its old masters and tapestries and fine crystal remained. No more pheasant shoots, no more golfing week-ends, no more striving for honours for Glenn. No more liveried servants and expensive cars, all these luxuries he had bought with stolen diamonds at the price of an honest man's name. "Gate-crashers," Ronnie, striding along at my side, had once called him and his guests, and I had found the gibe British and rather snobbish. But I had the feeling now that those old Earls of Sedgwicke were having the last laugh.

Well, Glenn Disford had died in shame and disgrace. But the women would remain and would have to pay the price, these three women who had bulked so largely in his life. My heart smote me at the thought of them: Marcia, so helpless, so inured to luxury, and, as it would seem, in bad health; Laura Verge, whose whole life had been bound up in Glenn's; Rosemary, poor distraught Rosemary, who, I felt very sure, had loved him but had stood aside for her sister. What would become of them now?

The sound of a clock striking was borne to our ears over the still air—it was the stable clock at Arkwood striking eleven. Lights moved among the elms of the Prince Consort's Walk—as we drew nearer we saw that they were centred about the little temple. The moon made everything as bright as day. We entered the grove through an opening in the clipped box hedge and perceived, at the end of the Walk, dark figures gathered about something that lay on the grass just in front of the temple.

Someone was waving at us with a loud "Hey!" and from the other end of the grove a stout policeman with a flashlight

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came hurrying. On recognizing Mr. Treadgold he stopped and touched his cap. "Beg pardon, Mr. Treadgold," he said, "I didn't know it was you. No one's to be let in—the Inspector's instructions. Very strict, 'e was—two of our chaps are up at Arkwood now, by 'is orders, to see that nobody leaves the 'ouse."

"That's all right, Sergeant Dawson," replied Mr. Treadgold in his easy way. "The Inspector sent for me and my friends here. What happened, do you know?"

"I don't rightly know, except that it's Sir Glenn, sir, and 'e's been shot. The butler was with the Inspector when they found 'im—'e's around 'ere somewheres." Then we saw Havilland, looking oddly jaunty in a check sports coat and grey flannels, hastening towards us.

His story was concise. After supper Sir Glenn had gone off to his study. Havilland, who took Sunday evenings off, arrived back from the village on his bicycle soon after ten, and five minutes later Inspector Manderton had driven up in a car, asking for Sir Glenn. But Sir Glenn was not to be found. He was not in his study and Lady Disford, who had already retired to her room, sent word to say she had not seen him since dinner. Eric Clayden, who was alone in the lounge, mentioned that about three quarters of an hour before he had caught sight of him going down through the gardens in the direction of the Prince Consort's Walk. On that, at the Inspector's request, Havilland had escorted Manderton in search of him. They had come upon him lying dead at the end of the Prince Consort's Walk with his automatic by his side. The Inspector had sent immediately to the village for Dr. Hammond who had already arrived and was making his examination.

With a brusque nod Mr. Treadgold strode off to where Manderton's burly form was now visible in silhouette against the white background of the summer-house. "Has the news been broken to Lady Disford?" I asked the butler. Havilland shook his head. "I couldn't rightly say, miss: it was one of the maids as went up to ask her ladyship if she'd seen anything of Sir Glenn. I think all the ladies must have gone to bed:

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leastwise, the only person about, when the Inspector arrived, was Mr. Clayden, in the lounge." He wagged his head dolefully. "It's a shockin' business, miss, shockin'!"

"Yes, but Lady Disford must be told," I said firmly. Ronnie had followed in Mr. Treadgold's wake. I went to where he stood halted a little distance from the group in front of the temple. The moonlight was so bright that I was able to recognize little Dr. Hammond and the sandy-haired police superintendent from Maiden Shapley kneeling on the grass, with the Inspector and Mr. Treadgold stooping to watch them. Presently Manderton drew Mr. Treadgold aside and then only as they moved, did I make out the dark shape that sprawled on the turf. The dead man was face downward with one arm flung out, the gold signet ring he wore gleaming in the beam of a flash-light that one of the two men crouched there was using. He might have been asleep, so relaxed and still did he lie.

I said to Ronnie: "From what Havilland says, I don't believe they know yet up at the house. Don't you think we ought to find Marcia?"

"Better wait," he told me. "There's something odd going on. I can't quite make it out."

I glanced to where the Inspector and Mr. Treadgold conversed in undertones. I saw Mr. Treadgold give the Inspector the knife and point to the initials on the sheath. It might have been the moonlight, but it struck me that Mr. Treadgold's habitually florid countenance was unusually pallid. Now Dr. Hammond and the police superintendent came over and there was a long discussion. Fragments of their talk drifted across to where Ronnie and I stood. I heard Hammond say: "There's not a doubt about it. I couldn't be mistaken about a thing like that," and a little later Manderton's deep voice boomed out something about an automatic and "a shell in the magazine." After a lot more talk Dr. Hammond returned to the dead man, taking the superintendent with him, and Manderton and Treadgold came over to where we waited.

The Inspector gave Ronnie a piercing look but said nothing.

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To me he remarked with a wag of the head: "Mr. Treadgold has told me of your experience to-night, Miss Pell. I'm glad it was no worse. We'll get Dr. Hammond to take a look at that shoulder of yours presently. How are you feeling?"

"All right. It's only a scratch, really."

He grunted. "You're a very plucky young lady and we're much indebted to you, by all accounts." Then Mr. Treadgold broke in abruptly. It was no moonlight illusion, after all—now that I saw him close to, his face was as white as paper while his eyes were positively haggard. "The Inspector wants to see Lady Disford," he said. "Can you get her for him?"

I hesitated. "From what Havilland says, I don't believe the news has been broken to her yet: she's probably in bed and asleep." I paused. "We'll have to spare her as much as possible. She's not well, you know. The specialist ordered her absolute quiet."

Mr. Treadgold furrowed his brow. Then, whipping out his glasses, he put them on and glared at me. "Specialist?" he rapped out. "What specialist? I didn't know she was ill. What are you taking about?"

"A specialist was over to see her yesterday, some man from Harley Street. Sir Andrew Something . . ."

Havilland's spectral voice boomed from the rear. "Sir Andrew Cromartie is the name, sir. A friend of Sir Glenn's."

"Cromartie?"—Mr. Treadgold's voice was deeply perplexed. "Andrew Cromartie? But he's . . ." His voice trailed off, without finishing the sentence. He was still staring at me, but I had the impression that his thoughts were miles away. Just then Dr. Hammond called the Inspector over and Manderton went across to him. I don't think Mr. Treadgold even saw him go, so absorbed was he with his own reflections, frowning heavily and toying with his watch chain.

I said to Mr. Treadgold: "I think I'd better get hold of Rosemary. She can break the news to Marcia and then if the Inspector wants to see her . . ."

All this time Ronnie had stood motionless at my side.

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Mr. Treadgold had stirred from his reverie and was contemplating us with a bleak air.

"Disford didn't kill himself," he said at last. "He was shot from a distance with a shot-gun. They thought at first it was suicide because a shot had been discharged from the automatic they found beside him; but that was unquestionably the shot he fired at you. It looks as if he had been killed on his way back from the bungalow—he probably drew his automatic to defend himself, but it was too late."

Ronnie broke in: as for me I was past speech. "But it's unbelievable!" cried Ronnie. "Who could have shot him?" He became very agitated. "Good heavens, man," he exclaimed, "don't you realize what this means? Elvira as good as told me, down at the lake that night, that she had a hold over certain people and the material to prove it, and I naturally assumed that she was alluding to people here, at Arkwood. But this is an outside job, and we've all been barking up the wrong tree!"

Mr. Treadgold shook his head coldly. "I'm not so sure about that," he remarked, "but we shall very soon know whether I'm wrong. Meanwhile, don't let's waste time in argument." Then, perceiving that the Inspector had come back, he said: "If you're going to see Lady Disford, there's one specific question I'd like to ask her."

Manderton looked at him inquiringly. "O.K.!" he replied.

"Let's go, then!" said Mr. Treadgold, and in a body we moved towards the house.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

THERE were lights in the lounge as we gained the terrace, where a policeman kept stolid watch, and the muted jangle of the radio wafting snatches of Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" through the open windows. We could see Clayden inside, seated by himself at a card table. As the butler was about to leave us to go round to the service

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entrance the Inspector cautioned him to be on hand in case he was wanted. "And not a word to anyone in the house about this business!" he warned.

Clayden, a cigarette in his mouth, a tall tumbler at his elbow, was playing solitaire—what the English call patience—humming to himself and waving the cards as he laid them, in time with the radio. He looked up inquiringly from his game as the four of us entered. "Good evening, Inspector, good evening, Uncle Toby, and my gracious goodness, if it isn't Ronniel!" was his greeting while his eyes reverted to his cards. "Turn off that wireless!" the Scotland Yard man barked out over his shoulder to whoever might hear him, and walked up to the table. Ronnie shut off the radio and the lovely melody died.

"Did you find Sir Glenn?" Clayden asked, continuing his solitaire. Placing a queen on a jack he glanced up in time to catch the Inspector's unrevealing nod. "Is it permitted to inquire," he questioned with a card poised in his fingers, "what that policeman is supposed to be doing out there on the terrace?"

Manderton left the query unanswered. "Have you seen Lady Disford to-night?" he demanded.

Nonchalantly the young man put down a card. "Not since dinner."

"Do you know where Miss Verge is?"

"She was here after dinner. She went off later to find Sir Glenn."

"At what time was this?"

Clayden's fingers fluttered over the table. "Oh, I don't know—around nine, I dare say." He lifted his glance and spoke across the Inspector to the far side of the room. "For goodness' sake, Vergie," he cried plaintively, "come and deal with official curiosity about your movements yourself. . . ."

Laura Verge had entered the lounge. "You were looking for Sir Glenn, Inspector?"

Manderton nodded. "Yes, madam. You saw him after dinner, I believe. At what time was that?"

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"Soon after nine."

"Where?"

"In his study." Her manner was businesslike and cool.

"Did he say anything about going out?"

She made a barely perceptible pause. "He did speak of wanting a breath of fresh air."

"And he went out?"

"I expect so—I didn't actually see him go. He sometimes likes to stroll in the Prince Consort's Walk after dinner."

"And you haven't seen him since?"

She shook her head. "Where have you been?" the Inspector asked.

"With Lady Disford."

"Ever since you left Sir Glenn?"

"No. First I went to my room for a little while." She paused. "Haven't you found Sir Glenn?"

"We found him, madam!" There was a hint of doubt in the way in which, for a brief moment, her eyes rested on the Inspector's face. "Because Lady Disford was asking for him," she explained.

The Inspector was polishing his nails on the palm of his hand. "What's become of her sister, do you know? Is she with Lady Disford?"

"She was, earlier in the evening—they went upstairs together. She's not with her now."

Clayden spoke up from his solitaire. "I expect she's out in the park. At least, I heard a shot out there a while back—she may be taking a pot at the rabbits."

I was watching Laura and it seemed to me that she stiffened. I could tell nothing from her face for she dropped her eyes immediately.

The Scotland Yard man frowned, but his manner remained dry and official. "You mean, she went out there with a gun?" he questioned.

Clayden glanced out of the window beside him. "Well, it's a good time, with the moon full like this."

"Is this a regular practice of hers, to go rabbit shooting

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at night?" Manderton's glance roamed inquiringly about the circle.

The young man had returned to his solitaire. "Not more than anybody else. We all take a pot at the bunnies from time to time—we've even persuaded old Wace to come out."

"The ladies, too?" the Inspector inquired.

"Rather. Especially Miss Verge. You wouldn't think it to look at her, Inspector, but Miss Verge is a terror to the rabbits. Aren't you, my Vergie?" He shifted one of his stacks.

Laura, who was smoking a cigarette on the chesterfield, gazing in front of her, disregarded this sally. So did Manderton. "Does Lady Disford shoot, too?" he wanted to know.

Clayden placed a card. "Yes, everybody shoots. Not that we ever hit much."

"And what do you use, may I ask, sir? Rabbit-rifle or shot-gun?"

Eric put down his cigarette and began to mix up the pack. "I don't see any of us, barring Sir Glenn, perhaps, hitting even a haystack with a rifle," he remarked with a chuckle. "Sir Glenn has two or three old guns he lends us.

"Where are these guns kept?"

Clayden was dealing himself another hand. "In the games room, properly speaking. But people are always leaving them about or taking them up to their bedrooms—one sometimes gets a shot from the window, you know. And that reminds me," he went on as he dealt, "you left your gun on the table in the temple when you were out in the park before dinner this evening, Vergie."

I saw the Scotland Yard man's glance shift swiftly to Miss Verge. "Did I?" she said stolidly.

"It was you, wasn't it? Didn't I see you going down through the gardens with a gun just after the six o'clock news this afternoon?" Clayden persisted.

Manderton's eye was on her again. "Yes, that's right," she agreed.

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"And did you leave your gun in the temple, madam?" he inquired.

"I must have, if Mr. Clayden saw it there. I remember one of the servants coming out and calling me in to the telephone."

"Then the gun is still where you left it?"

"I suppose so."

"Was it loaded, can you tell me?"

She hesitated. "I'm afraid I don't remember. . . ." She glanced up as though to ask a question, but appeared to think better of it, and her eyes fell away. Her expression was perfectly enigmatic as, with a sort of blind gesture, she crushed her cigarette out in the stand beside her. I had the impression that something she had seen in the Inspector's face had alarmed her; but what exactly she had read there I could not fathom.

Manderton was at his nail polishing again. "Would you or someone, madam," he said to Laura, "tell Lady Disford I'd like a word with her? With her sister, too, if she's anywhere to be found?"

"I'll go," said Miss Verge and went silently out. The detective's air was as cryptic as ever, but I noticed that, as if in response to some nervous reflex, he was opening and shutting his hands and tugging at his fingers, like a pianist loosening up before a recital, and it occurred to me that he was bracing himself for an ordeal. Meanwhile, Mr. Treadgold, who had been scribbling on a sheet of paper torn from his notebook, now crossed to the Inspector and, whispering to him, showed him what he had written. With a brief nod Manderton took the paper.

"You were asking for me, Inspector?"

Marcia Disford had appeared from the corridor. She was very pale and her long house-coat of white and gold, close fitting with tight sleeves, gave her the air of a fairy princess. Laura was with her. Before the door closed I had a glimpse of Rosemary slipping in and seating herself in the shadow against the wall. Her face was sullen and unrevealing—in her white shirt and slacks she looked like a defiant boy.

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Manderton had drawn up a chair for Marcia. He held Uncle Toby's paper in his hand and was looking down at it, fingering his heavy moustache with an uncertain air. At length he said: "I've written down a question, madam, which I prefer to submit to you privately, only remarking that you're free to answer it or not, as you wish."

Marcia took the paper, glanced at it, then raised her eyes to his face. She moved her shoulders in an indifferent shrug. "I don't quite see the purport of your question, but there's no reason why I shouldn't answer it," she said. "The answer is, yes!" Her gaze lingered. "But how could you know?"

The Scotland Yard man ignored the question. Fixing her with his searching regard: "I'm afraid I must prepare you for bad news, madam," he announced.

Her dark eyes widened: they were pools of light shadowed by fear; and with a quick gesture she laid a hand on her heart. "It's about my husband, isn't it?" she said in a low voice.

The Inspector nodded.

"He's dead?"

With a catch of the breath Manderton inclined his head once more. "We found him not an hour ago in the Prince Consort's Walk. He had been shot at less than a dozen paces with a shot-gun."

I expected her to collapse and, indeed, for a moment she closed her eyes and seemed to sway as she leaned back in her chair. A voice cried "Marcy!" and whipping round, I saw that Eric Clayden was on his feet. I had a momentary glimpse of Laura Verge, her brown and wrinkled face as grimly impassive as though carved out of old ivory. Marcia uttered a little wailing cry. "Oh, Eric!" she ejaculated in a broken voice and covered her face with her hands. Clayden had swung to Manderton. "He was shot, you say? But how—who . . .?" He stopped there and turned towards Laura with a glance charged with meaning.

But Miss Verge sat staring in front of her, as rigid as any Buddha, and gave no sign. Unconsciously my eye sought out Rosemary. She had not budged from her place against

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the wall, her glance cast down, one long leg crossed over the other, a cigarette smoking between her fingers.

The Inspector, brisk and menacing, was addressing Marcia. "There are certain questions I wish to ask you, madam," he said stiffly. "But I should warn you that anything you may say may be used against you. . . ." At that Clayden would have sprung forward, but for Mr. Treadgold's large arm that barred the way. "But this is preposterous," Eric protested. "Take it easy, old man," said Mr. Treadgold, pushing him back on a chair. He made a sign to Manderton who, disregarding the interruption, addressed Marcia again. "You resented your husband's friendship with Mrs. Canning, madam?" he said.

She bowed her head forlornly. "Yes."

"Did you know she was blackmailing him?"

She nodded again—her "Yes" was almost inaudible.

"Did your husband ever tell you that Disford was not his real name?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "No, he didn't."

"But you knew it?"

She made no reply. "Wasn't his real name Groper, Ray Groper? And wasn't he at one time assistant purser on board the *Red Knight*?"

"He so rarely spoke about his past . . ."

"Nevertheless, you knew about it, didn't you?"

She nodded then but did not speak.

"How did you find out?" When she still remained silent, "Didn't a certain envelope which Mrs. Canning entrusted to Miss Pell for safe keeping fall into your hands?" he questioned threateningly.

She looked about her then with a desperate look in her lovely eyes. "Answer the question, madam!" the Inspector ordered sternly.

She bowed her head in mute agony. "And didn't you realize from the contents of that envelope that it was your husband who murdered Woodman, the ex-steward of the *Red Knight*, at the inn at Burstowe, and that he also poisoned Elvira Canning to prevent her giving him away?"

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Her nod was almost imperceptible: she was clasping and unclasping her hands. The Inspector went on in a deep and challenging voice: "And when you realized the sort of man you had married, you shot him, isn't that the way of it?"

She stirred from her lethargy then. "No, no," she cried. "It's not true, it's not true!"

"You suspected that Elvira Canning had some hold over your husband, didn't you? That was why you took that envelope from Miss Pell's room!"

"It's a lie!" she cried violently. "I never took it."

"Then how did it come into your possession, madam?"

A quiet voice spoke from the background. "It was I who took that envelope from Miss Pell's room, Inspector!"

Laura Verge had stood up. In even tones she said: "I overheard Mr. Clayden say something to Mr. Wace about an envelope he'd seen Mrs. Canning give Miss Pell. It was when we were all down at the bathing place, the day after Danbury's murder—the inquest, if you remember, was fixed for that afternoon. Going into Miss Pell's bedroom unexpectedly before lunch to tell her about the inquest, I saw her hide something in the wardrobe."

She paused. "Sir Glenn never spoke to me about his relations with Mrs. Canning," she went on as calmly as before, "and I never asked him about them. But I was virtually certain that she had some hold over him and when I saw that envelope I made sure it contained letters of his to Mrs. Canning or something of the kind. So I took it to Sir Glenn..."

"Without opening it?"

"Without opening it," she answered firmly. "I left the envelope with Sir Glenn and heard no more about it."

The Inspector's glance lingered for a moment, then switched back to Marcia. "And how did you get hold of it, Lady Disford?"

She seemed to falter. "My husband gave it to me to read," she replied in a low voice.

"Your husband *gave* it to you? Do you really expect us to believe that?"

"It's the truth, nevertheless."

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"When is this supposed to have taken place?"

She hesitated. "This morning, before lunch."

Mr. Treadgold spoke up quietly. "After the specialist's visit, was it?"

"That's right!"

The detective flung Mr. Treadgold an impatient look. "So your husband gave you this document, or whatever it is, of Mrs. Canning's this morning?" he said to Marcia. "And by a remarkable coincidence he's shot dead to-night. How do you explain that?"

She shook her head miserably. "I can't explain it," she answered with a sob.

"Where is this paper of Mrs. Canning's now?"

Her voice sank almost to a whisper. "I haven't got it."

"You mean, your husband took it back?"

She shook her head, pressing her handkerchief to her lips. "I don't know . . . I can't say."

"At least, you can tell us what that paper contains . . ."

She gazed about her wildly, but made no reply. It was evident that Manderton's patience was beginning to wear thin. "Come, madam," he said sharply. "I'm waiting for your answer," and, when she remained obstinately mute, "My advice to you, madam, is to try and realize your position. As a police officer it's my duty to get to the bottom of this business and I don't propose to allow myself to be put off by prevarication or evasion. Or perhaps you would prefer me to arrest you at once and charge you with your husband's murder?"

Marcia uttered a cry. "No, no," she clamoured, "it's not true. I never killed him. How could you think I'd ever do such a thing?"

"Then answer my question!" the Inspector thundered. "I've plenty of time: if I have to stay here all night, I mean to get at the truth."

At that moment Laura Verge stepped between them. "It will probably save trouble if I tell you now that it was I who shot Sir Glenn," she said.

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Chapter Twenty-Nine

A DEATHLY silence fell. The Scotland Yard man, baffled, glared at Laura: Marcia, with lips parted, seemed struck dumb with horror. I was aware that Mr. Treadgold was leaning forward intently.

Laura said in her gruff voice: "I told you I didn't open that envelope. Well, it isn't true. I did. Instead of going to my room after dinner, as I told you, I followed Sir Glenn out to the Prince Consort's Walk, where I knew I'd left my gun, in the little temple."

The Inspector cleared his throat. "Why did you kill him?" he asked stridently.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'd read that paper of Mrs. Canning's. As you say, it made it clear that he'd committed two murders in order to cover up his past . . ."

"Did you regard that fact as an adequate reason?"

She flushed. "It's the only reason I propose to give you."

"You told me you saw Sir Glenn in his study after dinner to-night. Will you inform us what took place at that interview?"

She shook her head. "No. I shot him. That's all I have to tell you."

Manderton frowned. "Except your reasons, Miss Verge."

"I'm giving you no further explanation," she answered stubbornly.

The Inspector shot her an angry glance. But she avoided it, standing there, her eyes cast down, her hands clasped in front of her. Mr. Treadgold's bland voice interposed. "Would it be in order if I asked Miss Verge a question, Inspector?" he remarked. And without waiting for permission he said: "Had Sir Andrew Cromartie's visit to Lady Disford anything to do with it?"

She looked up, puzzled. "Sir Andrew Cromartie?" she repeated. "The specialist, do you mean?"

"That's right," Mr. Treadgold replied imperturbably.

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"What on earth could Sir Andrew have to do with it? All I know about him is that he was staying with the Farrars and that Glenn, who was worried about Marcia's recent fainting spell, called him in to have a look at her heart." She spoke rather tartly.

"He's a heart specialist, is he?" asked Mr. Treadgold.

"I've no idea what he is," she retorted and turned back to the Scotland Yard man who was listening with a fidgety air. Quickly he broke in with a question. "About that statement, madam?"

She shook her head. "You needn't trouble yourself about that, Inspector."

Manderton's face became thunderous. "You mean, it's destroyed?"

Her features froze. "If you like. You won't find it, anyway." She raised her eyes to his. "Do we have to waste any more time on all this? I've told you that I killed Sir Glenn. If you'll draw up a statement to that effect, I'll sign it."

There was a sudden movement in the shadows near the door. Rosemary with her easy gait came thrusting forward from her place against the wall. At the sight of her Laura's face changed. "Rosemary!" she cried warningly. But the Wreith girl shook her head. As nonchalant as ever she walked up to the Scotland Yard man. "If it's that statement of Mrs. Canning's you want . . ." Coldly contemptuous, she dipped into the pocket of her slacks and with some difficulty dragged out an envelope which she planked down on the occasional table by which the detective was standing. "I took the liberty of borrowing it from my sister while she was out of her room after dinner to-night," she explained. There was a moan from Laura. "Oh, Rosemary, what have you done?" she murmured in a broken voice.

With a face of flint the Inspector picked up the envelope. It had been torn across and as he turned it over he recognized Elvira's initials on the large red seal on the back. His air was faintly incredulous as he drew from the envelope a wad of manuscript, held together with a fastener, written on the

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pale blue crested Arkwood paper, the quarto size. But I saw his eyes glisten as he glanced at the topmost sheet.

"If one might ask Miss Wreith a question . . ." Mr. Treadgold suggested deprecatingly. The Inspector, absorbed in his reading, merely grunted. Shifting his gaze to Rosemary, Mr. Treadgold said: "You didn't learn of the existence of this document until last night, did you?"

She looked at him sharply, but did not answer. "Weren't you outside my bungalow when Clarissa and I were talking about it? Didn't you tackle your sister about it and didn't she refuse to discuss it?" Mr. Treadgold pressed her.

She gave a little nod. "Yes."

"So you took that manuscript from Marcia without her knowledge. Wasn't that because, although Sir Glenn had given it to her to read, she'd done nothing about it?"

Her eyes had never quitted his face—she was growing more and more perplexed. Mr. Treadgold leaned forward expectantly. "There was a special reason for your sister's attitude, wasn't there?" he suggested. "Inspector Mander-ton found it hard to believe that Glenn should have shown Marcia that manuscript, but he had a special reason, too, didn't he? The same reason that Marcia had when she decided to keep silent about the contents of that document?"

Rosemary hesitated and her gaze flashed across to her sister. She gave an indifferent shrug. "That's right," she answered at last and added: "And I begin to realize how you guessed."

Marcia was weeping now: her sobs cut across the taut silence in the room. "You wouldn't accept your sister's attitude," Mr. Treadgold persisted quietly. "You wanted to have it out with Glenn, didn't you? And you had it out with him to-night."

Rosemary was silent, gazing at him blankly. "You've heard Eric say that Laura left her gun on the table down in the temple before dinner." He shook his head reproachfully. "You know, there was no sign of any gun when we found Glenn to night. . . ."

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She was clenching and unclenching her small fists: still she did not speak. "My dear," said Mr. Treadgold very gently, "don't you think you'd better tell us the truth?"

Laura cried suddenly: "Rosemary, for God's sake! Rosemary, think what you're doing!"

Mr. Treadgold said: "Rosemary . . ." and waited.

With the manuscript in his hands Manderton had been following the play back and forth of question and answer, his head turning from side to side like a spectator at a lawn tennis match. Rosemary did not speak for what seemed like an age, letting her eye, defiant but, oh, so anguished, rove slowly round the hushed room—from Mr. Treadgold, whose air was full of compassion, to Marcia in her white and gold gown crying despairingly into her handkerchief, to the Inspector impassively expectant and back to Mr. Treadgold again.

Then her features stiffened. With an upward thrust of her chin she said rather hoarsely: "Very well then. I shot Glenn—Laura was only trying to shield me. He thought he could bluff it out, but the moment I read that story of Elvira's this evening I knew the best he could hope for was to disappear for ever from our lives, Marcy's and mine. I gave him his chance to night, but he wouldn't take it . . ." The tears welled up in her eyes but she dashed them away. "He wouldn't understand that, even if that manuscript were burnt and he escaped arrest, nothing could ever efface the memory of the ghastly things he'd done, that Marcy . . ."

She broke off choking, the tears streaming down her cheeks, her small breasts heaving. Then she sprang forward just in time to catch her sister who, with eyes closed and a ghastly face, was slipping from her chair. From across the room Laura and Eric came dashing and I was following them when Mr. Treadgold stepped in my path. "Let Laura manage," he said.

His grasp was firm on my arm. "Come," he told me, "I'm going to take you out of this."

A scrap of paper lay on the carpet. I stooped and gathered it up as Mr. Treadgold gently propelled me towards the

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terrace. Outside in the moonlight I held out the fragment of paper to him. "It's the question you gave to Inspector Manderton," I explained. "I recognized your writing. I haven't read it."

He gave me a wistful smile. "Go ahead and read it if you like. Though I doubt if you'll understand it. It's an odd question."

I held the paper in the light that streamed from the window. It *was* an odd question, a very odd question. Pencilled in Uncle Toby's round and flowing hand, I read:

"Am I right in supposing that you are expecting a baby?"

I stared at my companion. "Marcy? It's not possible. Uncle Toby, who told you?"

He smiled. "Nobody."

"But none of *us* knew. How did you find out?"

"Cromartiel!"

"Cromartie? The specialist?"

"He's the best man in England for this kind of thing." He chuckled. "There's nothing surprising in a respectable virgin like our Laura being ignorant of his particular line," he went on, "but the moment I'd established this fact, it was apparent to me that she hadn't heard about Marcy's interesting news and so couldn't know the real reason why Glenn was killed, ergo, she didn't kill him."

I shook my head. "I don't believe I follow."

"Why," he exclaimed, "Glenn was crazy to have a child. Now do you understand why he made a clean breast of everything to Marcy, so that he could stay and bluff it out? But Rosemary knew better: from that conversation she'd overheard between us at my bungalow she realized that I was on the track of that envelope, that Glenn was a doomed man . . ." He laughed drily. "With Marcy's baby on the way, she was obviously determined to have no hempen widow in the family."

"What's a hempen widow?"

He smiled. "It's thieves' slang for a woman whose husband has been hanged. There's an old song in thieves' jargon—'cant,' as it's called—that goes:

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In the stone jug at Newgate I was born
Of a hempen widow the kid forlorn!"

He shook his head doggedly. "Rosemary didn't see it that way," he sighed. "Poor Rosemary . . ."

"Uncle Toby," I said tremulously, "do you think they'll hang her?"

He made a vague gesture of hands. "I don't think she intended to kill him—it was pure chance that the gun was there. And he was armed. She might get away with a manslaughter charge—it depends very much on her story." He looked backward to the open windows of the lounge. "But here's someone looking for you, my dear. I'll leave you—I'm anxious to see that statement of Elvira's."

Ronnie had emerged from the house. He stood there in the moonlight, dark and svelte and proud, his eyes shining. My heart was heavy and my shoulder throbbed. Gazing at him I realized that here was refuge from all the hate and horror that had beset me in that house. I slipped into his arms as Mr. Treadgold, his back tactfully turned on us, plodded sturdily away to the lounge.

Chapter Thirty

HERE is Elvira Canning's statement, contained in that envelope she entrusted to me, as Mr. Treadgold let us, Ronnie and me, read it next morning. It was written out by hand and though I had never seen her writing, I felt that the sprawling characters were typical of her—they must have covered a score of sheets of the Arkwood notepaper. It bore the heading, doubly underscored:

THE RED KNIGHT. 12TH DECEMBER, 1919. THE FACTS
STATEMENT BY ELVIRA CANNING GALBRAITH

and ran:

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"It will be twenty years next December since the *Red Knight*, by which my late husband, Brig Galbraith, and I, were returning from the Cape, was lost. But every incident of that night is as fresh in my memory as though it happened yesterday. I have made up my mind to write it all down here because, now that Alf Woodman is dead, Ray Groper, the man who now calls himself Glenn Disford, and I are the only ones alive who know the full story and if anything should happen to me I want to have the truth about the *Red Knight* diamonds put on record.

"I am usually taken for an American. Actually I was born and brought up in London—Kennington—but I lived in the States from the time of my marriage to Brig in 1914 until we went abroad in 1919, and I have spent most of my time there since he was drowned in the *Red Knight*. I was only a kid—seventeen—and dancing in one of Cochran's shows in London, when Brig married me and took me back to the States with him. At that time and indeed, until after he came out of the American Army—he spent a year with the engineers on the Mexican border in the Great War—I had no more idea than the man in the moon what he did for a living except betting on the races. I only knew that I was crazy about him and he about me, and that he always seemed to have money to spend on me. Then he pulled off his biggest coup, the Bar Harbour jewel robbery in the summer of '19, and I discovered the truth because we had to get out of the country in a hurry. But I didn't care. Brig was a reckless son of a gun, and he may have been a safe-cracker; but he was a charming companion, one of the most charming men I have ever known.

"We went to England first and then to South Africa. In December, 1919, we were at Cape Town. The Transvaal police were inquisitive about a job Brig had tried to pull at Jo'burg and failed, and he decided to 'blow,' as he called it. He asked me how I would like to spend Christmas in England and I jumped at the chance: the real reason was that he had heard that a lot of rich people, South African millionaires and their wives, were sailing home for Christmas

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in the *Red Knight*, and his idea was that he might pick up something in his line of business on the way across. That is why we registered in the name of Monk—Brig, who always thought of everything, had got us passports in that name when we were in London.

"Ray Groper—'Conky' Groper, as Brig always called him—was assistant purser of the *Red Knight*. The moment I set eyes on him, with his huge nose and flash air, I knew he was a wrong 'un, and my suspicions were confirmed when he turned out to be an old friend of Brig's—I also realized why Brig had booked us by that particular ship. It appeared that Brig, who had started life in the bookmaking line, had had some dealings on the racetracks in Australia with Conky before he met me—Conky was an Australian. But I gathered that the bookmaking lay got too hot for them, and they had to quit.

"It was clear from the start that we were not going to get rich on that trip. Not that there were not lots of diamonds splashed about—one old girl, Lady Manasseh, used to come in to dinner hung all over like a Christmas tree; but the stuff all found its way back to the purser's safe at night. Conky would make Brig's mouth water with his stories of the loot in the safe—not only jewellery, but uncut stones, bags of them. Brig was always making plans as to how he could get at all those diamonds: he used to boast that the safe had yet to be made that, given enough time, he could not open with his hands—Brig had wonderful hands and he took great pride in them. But Conky laughed at him, telling him to forget it—the office was never left unguarded. Brig even thought of cutting the purser in; but Conky told him to lay off Anderson—that was the purser: there was nothing doing. I must say I agreed with him. Anderson was a tough, red-haired Scot, a bad-tempered devil, but as straight as they are made, I would have said.

"When Brig set his heart on anything he was the hard one to shake. He would lie for hours in his bunk as we went through the Red Sea, never speaking; but I knew he was thinking of that safe fairly bursting with what he called 'the

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ice.' Even when the ship struck the reef, the purser's safe was still in his mind.

"It was after midnight when the crash came. I was already in bed: Brig in his dinner clothes was reading a magazine in a chair. The whole ship shuddered: the lights blinked but came on again; Brig was flung half way across the room. All through the ship we heard things tumbling about and the floor canted right over. Bells pealed and whistles began to blow; and after a little there were shouts of 'Boat stations, please! Put on your lifebelts! Everyone on deck!'

"I was half dead with fright. But Brig, who had picked himself up, was quite cool. A steward put his head in at our stateroom and shouted: 'Nobody wait to dress! Get on deck before it's too late!' Brig helped me into my fur coat, fastened my lifebelt about me and gave me my jewel case. Then with a smile: 'Bonny,' he said—that was what he always called me—'now would be a chance to have a crack at that safe.' I told him he was crazy, that we must get on deck at once, and made him put on his overcoat and his lifebelt over it.

"All this time people had been thundering past our room. But when we opened the door at last the corridor was deserted. Then someone came running. It was Groper. He said: 'She's ashore all right. It'll be a good half hour before the boats get off. The First Officer sent for Anderson. Everybody's lining up on deck. The office is deserted. If you wanted a go at that safe . . .'

"Brig turned to me. 'There's a small fortune in this for us, Bonny. Conky will take you upstairs. Give me ten minutes and I'll meet you at our boat station.'

"I said: 'You're out of your minds, the pair of you. Do you want us all to be drowned?' Brig said: 'We've half an hour, sweet—you heard him say so.' 'O.K.,' I answered. 'But if you go, I go. I'm coming with you.' 'Stop chewing the rag,' said Groper. 'Don't you realize it's now or never while the old man's up with the First?' 'Stow the gab, Conky, and lead on!' Brig told him.

"The purser's office was in a rare mess, with drawers

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open and papers flung all over the place. The lights were full on; there was not a living soul about. But the safe, with its door flush with the walls and facing the office counter, was closed. Brig had his lifebelt, overcoat and dinner jacket off in a moment. 'Shield me, you two, in case anyone comes down the companion,' he said, rolling up his sleeves. 'Don't worry, Brig,' said Groper. 'Alf Woodman will tip us off. I had to cut him in, but it's worth it.'

"Alf Woodman was the purser's steward. Once or twice he had served us drinks in Groper's bunk. He was a nasty piece of work, but he and Conky were as thick as thieves. Brig was rubbing his palms together lightly. 'Ready now and screen me,' he whispered. 'Old man Anderson is apt to pull a gun on me if he catches me.' He bent his ear to the lock and we moved over in front of him.

"The ship had heaved over some more. Chairs were sliding about the office. Suddenly Woodman came tumbling down the stairway. 'As you were,' he called softly. 'He's on his way below.' At the same instant we saw a figure clinging to the hand-rail appear round the corner of the flat. It was Anderson—he must have descended by some quicker way. He shouted at Woodman: 'Hey, you, why aren't you at your boat station?' Then he caught sight of Brig, his ear glued to the safe door, his fingers twiddling the combination, and pulled out a gun. 'Stand away from that safe!' he roared. I screamed: 'Brig! Look out!'; but just as Brig straightened up, there was a deafening explosion in my ear and I saw Anderson crumple up on the floor. Groper had a revolver in his hand with a little wisp of smoke clinging to the barrel. 'Alf, his keys! You know where he keeps them,' he called quietly to Woodman.

"Brig was as cool as ice. But he was scowling—he always hated gun play. 'Blast you, Conky!' he growled between his teeth. 'We could have managed without that.' But Conky only laughed. 'It's quicker my way!'

"The purser sprawled where he had fallen. His cap had fallen off: his head was a mess, his red hair all bloody. He had not budged. Woodman stooped over the body; Brig

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caught the keys as they came sailing through the air. 'Stay there,' he told Woodman, 'and watch out for anyone coming. You know the combination, do you?' he said to Groper. 'You betcha!' said Conky.

"They were stooping over the lock when the ship gave a tremendous lurch and we were all flung apart. But they had the safe open, for, as the ship rolled, the door swung wide and a shower of little canvas sacks and packets came tumbling out on the floor. I picked myself up. I was in a panic. I plucked at Brig's sleeve. 'Brig,' I said, 'for God's sake, get me out of this!' He patted my hand. 'That's all right, honey.' Groper was shouting something about a suitcase above the din of footsteps drumming overhead and things falling about. But I wasn't going to stay there and be drowned like a rat, and so I told Brig. He turned to Groper. 'I'm going to see Bonny to her boat station. You and Alf pack up the stuff. I'll be back and we'll all join Bonny at her boat.' He held out his hand. 'Come on, Bonny!'

"Those were the last words he ever spoke to me.

"The stairs were sagging dreadfully. We were half way up to the boat deck when the whole ship seemed to turn over. All the lights went out and I was smashed up against the stair rail. Something crashed down on me and that's the last I remember. When I came to I was in an open boat feeling dreadfully sick and cold with sleet blowing in my face. For months after that I lay in hospital at a place called Vigo with a fractured skull and a broken collar bone—it was weeks before they told me that Brig had been washed up on one of the islands where our liner was wrecked and buried there.

"This is the full story of what took place on board the *Red Knight*, the night she was wrecked. I charge Ray Groper, also known as 'Conky' Groper, formerly assistant purser, with having shot and killed Ronald Anderson, purser of the *Red Knight*, and looted the purser's safe on the night of the 12th of December, 1919, when the *Red Knight* was lost. I further charge him with having stabbed to death his accomplice in that crime, Alf Woodman, alias Danbury, purser's

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steward on the *Red Knight* at the time of the wreck, at the Sedgwicke Arms, Burstowe, Somersetshire, as the so-called Sir Glenn Disford himself admitted to me when I accused him of the murder next day.

"To conclude: after escaping from the wreck Groper found himself alone in mid-ocean on a raft. He was eventually picked up by a Sardinian fishing smack and, having bribed the captain, was landed in Sardinia without disclosing his real identity, or his connection with the *Red Knight*—I had these facts from Glenn Disford himself. He made his way to South America and thence to the States, where the first thing he did was to alter his appearance completely by having his very prominent nose operated and growing a moustache. I should never have known him again for, in addition to these changes, he had grown greyer and heavier, but for an extraordinary thing that happened in New York nearly ten years ago. A New York beauty doctor, Dr. Haro, of Park Avenue, was showing me an album of those 'before' and 'after' photographs of nose operations. To my amazement one of the photographs was of Ray Groper, as I knew him on the *Red Knight*, clean-shaven, with his big nose: the companion picture was that of a complete stranger, as far as I was concerned, with a straight, rather aquiline nose and a moustache. I knew then that Conky must have escaped the wreck and got clear away with the loot, and that, unless he had died in the interval, he was still enjoying the fruits of the robbery.

"On the off chance that he was still alive and that I might run him to earth I made the doctor give me those two photographs and asked him to try and trace the surgeon who had performed the operation. He found out that the operation had taken place in San Francisco in 1920. But the surgeon had died and all record of the patient had disappeared. Nevertheless, I kept the two photos in case I should ever come across Conky again. Then at Palm Beach last January I noticed a picture of Sir Glenn Disford, one of the new knights, in a London illustrated weekly. Something about the face was familiar and when I brought out the second of those two

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photos I had from Dr. Haro, although the Disford man was older and grizzled, I felt sure it was the same person. Conky Groper a knight—I had to laugh! Anyway, I went straight off to England and when at last I met him in London I knew by his eyes and voice and everything about him that I had made no mistake, and in the end he had to admit his identity. To prove that what I say is true I attach the two photos, and Dr. Haro, of New York, will confirm my story.

"If anything should happen to me, forward this statement with the two photos to Inspector Manderton at Scotland Yard. It will send Glenn Disford, knight or no knight, to the gallows.

"Every word of what I have written is the truth, so help me God!

"ELVIRA CANNING GALBRAITH.

"18th July, 1939."

The two photographs were pinned to the foot of the last page. One closely resembled the passport print that Mr. Treadgold had obtained from Lord Clanannan of Conky Groper, nose and all: the other showed a younger and less heavy but still recognizable Glenn. Incidentally, it revealed a quite surprising likeness to the drawing that Uncle Toby's artist friend had produced.

Chapter Thirty-One

I SIGHED as I handed Mr. Treadgold back the manuscript. "What a dramatic, terrible story! I think it's simply marvellous the way you spotted Groper!"

Mr. Treadgold beamed. "I follow a flair or maybe what a famous author calls 'a propensity to look into things which cross my way.'"

They had taken Rosemary away to Maiden Shapley in the night to be charged before the magistrates in the morning.

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Laura Verge had gone off early to try and see her after the court proceedings and at Ronnie's suggestion he and I had installed ourselves around noon under the big cedar at the turn of the avenue to intercept Laura on her way back. It was here, as we sat under the flat-spreading branches, with the fountain splashing in the court across the drive and Arkwood's red brick glowing in the sun, that Mr. Treadgold brought us Elvira's narrative.

"I was looking for a man of the purser type," Mr. Treadgold explained modestly. "Now pursers, as you know, have an enormously widespread acquaintance—they meet literally hundreds of people on shipboard every year—and it occurred to me that if Disford had really had a hand in the *Red Knight* business, as I strongly suspected, he could not have covered up his tracks over all these years without adopting some pretty radical form of disguise. On going through Clanannan's photos with this idea in mind, I was immediately struck by this chap Groper's outsize in noses." He shrugged his shoulders. "It wasn't so difficult, really. It's not the first time that a criminal has availed himself of plastic surgery, you know."

Facing us there in the shade, his ample proportions comfortably filling his garden seat, he reminded me of a large cat reposing itself after a mouse hunt. "There was one link in the case," he said, "upon which I stumbled more or less by accident in the closing stages yet which proved to be a determining factor of the very first importance—I mean, Marcia's interesting news: You know, Cromartie was brought in only to corroborate. Actually, Marcia took Rosemary into her confidence more than a fortnight ago."

"Before Danbury's murder, that would be?" said Ronnie.

"A good week before. Marcia was much upset by her husband's apparent infatuation for Elvira and would have kept the news from him until he returned to his senses. It was Rosemary who forced her to tell Glenn: knowing how greatly he desired a child she realized that this was the surest way of disposing of Elvira once and for all.

"The killing of Woodman," he went on after a pause,

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"was the act of a desperate man. But what had made Disford desperate? If he'd let Elvira blackmail him, why shouldn't he have bought Woodman off? Something must have driven him to the wall and when I heard that a famous gynaecologist had been called in to see Marcia, I guessed the truth. It was the discovery that his wife was expecting which decided Glenn to kill Woodman just as it decided him, with Woodman out of the way, to rid himself of Elvira. Incidentally, he must have been in a state of absolute panic when he killed Woodman or he'd have foreseen that Elvira would have guessed immediately that he was the murderer and that he'd have been more than ever in her power."

"How did Marcia get hold of that envelope of Elvira's?" I asked.

"She told us all about it last night when she came out of her faint. She learned about it first from Eric who warned her that it almost certainly contained letters or papers compromising her husband; but she was afraid to raise the matter with Glenn. Then yesterday morning Rosemary, who'd heard Clarissa and me speaking about the envelope the night before, insisted that Marcia should get the truth out of Disford. Without saying anything to Rosemary, Marcia tackled him after the specialist had gone. Glenn blustered a bit at first but then broke down and made a clean breast of everything. He swore he'd never been unfaithful to her with Elvira, but that Elvira, who'd been blackmailing him for months over the *Red Knight* affair, guessed that it was he who'd killed Woodman. And so he'd been forced to get rid of her in order to protect his home and the baby that was on the way. He was obsessed with the idea of this expected child, Marcia says. He had a woolly sort of idea that, if they burnt that manuscript, which she made him leave with her to read, everything would blow over and they could start life afresh."

Ronnie frowned. "After the way he poisoned the wretched Elvira? What did he have to tell Marcy about that?"

Mr. Treadgold looked stern. "That shook Marcia, I fancy. She knows the truth, I think, but she's not telling. I doubt

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if we shall ever learn what really happened down at the lake that night."

"And what about Rosemary?" I asked.

"From what Manderton told me last night the case doesn't look too bad for her," Mr. Treadgold replied. "Apparently she had a terrible scene down at the temple with Glenn. Her story is that when she didn't find Glenn in the park she was returning to the house when she noticed a gun lying on the table in the temple. She went to bring it in, and when in the temple saw Glenn crossing the Prince Consort's Walk, and called to him. She was unwise enough to let him know that she had that manuscript of Elvira's in her pocket and when she threatened to let Manderton have it if Glenn hadn't cleared out by morning, he pulled out his pistol and ordered her to hand the document over. On that she picked up the gun from the table and warned him to stand back. She claims she didn't know that Laura had left one barrel loaded and that the gun went off before she knew what she was doing. But that'll be a matter for the jury." He considered us spryly. "She's an attractive young woman. With a good advocate and a male jury she might get away with a verdict of manslaughter—say, eighteen months."

I sighed. "Poor Rosemary! She had a raw deal!"

"One thing puzzles me, Uncle Toby," said Ronnie. "How on earth did Woodman track Disford down?"

Mr. Treadgold chuckled. "That was very simple. He saw a news reel in Australia showing the opening of the Maiden Shapley hospital with his old shipmate, Elvira Monk, now described as Mrs. Canning, a guest at Arkwood of Sir Glenn Disford, the lion of the occasion, sitting on the platform with all the nobs. He worked his passage to England on the chance and once there, apparently found that she was again staying at Arkwood and wrote to her, saying he would be at the Sedgwick Arms at Burstowe on a given night and would expect to see her. Elvira never received this letter for, as Disford told his wife, his suspicions aroused by its grubby appearance, he opened it and went to the rendezvous in her place. All of which goes to show," he wound up with a twinkle

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in his eye, "that parties with a past should shun publicity as they say the old gent with horns and a tail shuns holy water . . ." He broke off. "But here's Laura!"

A car had stopped on the avenue and Laura was getting out. She moved slowly towards where we waited under the cedar and it seemed to me that all the spring had gone out of her walk. Mr. Treadgold sighed as we watched her approach. "Poor Laura! And to think there was a moment when I seriously suspected her," he told me under his breath. "First, the cape and then, the kümmel bottle. I had a word with her about the kümmel bottle last night. She knew nothing about that false clue—she simply found the empty bottle kicking about Glenn's study and threw it out." He wagged his head. "I was nearly making a bad bloomer there."

Laura looked exhausted. Wearily she sank into the chair Ronnie offered. After a pause she said in a toneless voice: "She fainted when she came out of court. They had to fetch a doctor to her. He ordered her immediate removal to hospital. He speaks of a complete nervous breakdown." She stopped short, then staring in front of her, went on: "I expect you all think I behaved in a very stupid and romantic fashion last night. But I was quite sure in my own mind that G.D., that Sir Glenn, had taken that manuscript back from Marcia and destroyed it and seeing that he was dead, I was hoping that we might have prevented all this sordid story from coming out."

Nobody spoke and she stood up. "I thought I'd just tell you this," she said awkwardly. "In the circumstances, you'll understand that I'm not staying on at Arkwood. As my train leaves very shortly, perhaps I'd better say goodbye now."

She held out her hand to Mr. Treadgold. He said: "I'm due back at the shop to-morrow. I'm motoring up to town this afternoon if I could give you a lift."

She seemed to shrink away. "You're very kind," she answered quickly, "but I'm going to my sister at Cambridge." Then she shook hands with Ronnie and turned to me. "I'm concerned about you and your plans, Clarissa. What are you going to do?"

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I hesitated and glanced at Ronnie. "Ronnie's taking me up to London in his car after lunch," I told her. I paused. "He wants me to marry him."

She fumbled for her glasses, put them on and looked from me to him. Then she nodded and took her glasses off again. "He'll do," she announced in her gruff voice and, stooping to my cheek, she kissed me. "Stay as you are, child!" she murmured. "You're very sweet!" I couldn't help it—the tears swam into my eyes. Through a blur I watched her, such a dumpy, forlorn, little figure in her low-heeled brogues, plod across the avenue and disappear into the house.

I wiped my eyes. "Poor Laura!" I said to Ronnie. "What a loyal soul she is! She told me once that loyalty is one of the rarest qualities in life."

"And so it is," declared Mr. Treadgold, coming up behind us and putting his arms round our shoulders, "as you two young people, about to embark on the greatest adventure of all, should never forget. Loyalty, my dear, is the mortar that binds human lives together. Because it was unworthily bestowed and vilely betrayed all this"—his arm swung out in a wide gesture that seemed to embrace the whole sweep of the great mansion with its pinnacles, and high roofs, and rows of windows winking in the sun—"all this has crashed to ruin!"

He had raised his voice and the quadrangle sent it echoing back. Only the murmur of the fountain and the whistle of the blackbirds broke the stillness as, arm-in-arm under the great cedar, the three of us took what I think we all felt was our last view of Arkwood.

THE END

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